



Berea Bible Handbook – Part Two

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel

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Hebrew History

Under the title of historical books we may include Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1, 2 Samuel, 1, 2 Kings, I, 2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther. Of these the five latter are included in the Hebrew text under the *Writings*; the others are grouped as the *Former Prophets*, a description the significance of which must not be overlooked.' Joshua, Judges and Ruth and the books of Samuel lead up to the establishment of the monarchy; Kings and Chronicles carry the story in parallel accounts up to the captivity; Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the return; Esther falls in the Persian period.

Excepting Ezra and Nehemiah, the books, strictly speaking, are anonymous. Joshua and Samuel no doubt owe much of their material to these leaders (cf. 1 Ch.29:29), but were evidently compiled after their death. Many prophetic writings and chronicles are quoted as sources of information; and, in general, these books bear every evidence of a care for accuracy similar to that which Luke manifested when writing his Gospel (Luke 1. 1-4).

They are also like Luke's Gospel in that they are no mere history. Whether they record the experience of individuals or of the nation, *God's* dealings

with them constitute the subject. God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob influences the form and content of the genealogies which are included, and is the reason for the inclusion of many incidents which unfold the story of its fulfilment. In the history of Israel the material is specially selected in order to emphasize their redemption from the bondage of Egypt, their calling and election as God's chosen people, and their function as the recipients of His oracles (Rom. 3: 2).

The reigns of kings are assessed according to whether they did right *in the sight of the Lord* and walked in the steps of David their father, or did evil like Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. Room is found not only for the deeds and characters of great national heroes—Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, and others—but also for the words of the otherwise unknown Micaiah, the son of Imlah, and the stories of the humble women who ministered to Elijah and Elisha.

So the books relate the wonderful acts of God (Psalm 61:4), how He put down the mighty from their seat and exalted the humble and meek. They reveal His holiness, His long-suffering, His compassion, His readiness to pardon the penitent, His seeking of the lost and His joy at their return. They relate the experiences of prophets and how they fulfilled their commissions. They correspond in their record of deeds to the truths proclaimed in the prophetic books in words. They give not only the predictions, but their fulfilment. They grant us an insight into the working out of God's great redemptive purpose in history, and show how the way was prepared for the coming of His Son.

In them, as in the prophetic books, we see a progress of thought from Israel as a chosen nation, to that true Israel within Israel, the faithful remnant; and then even within that remnant a pointing forward to the chosen servant, the Branch, the son of David, God's well-beloved Son. The history as well as the prophecy points forward constantly, like a series of signposts, to the One who should come. The genealogies and the events form a historical chain which links God's primal purpose in Adam with His ultimate purpose for mankind in Christ.

The treatment of the Old Testament history by Christ should be carefully studied. He never cast doubt either upon its main outlines or its minutest details. He mentions the incident of David and the shewbread (Mk. 2: 26), the glory of Solomon (Mt. 6: 29), the visit of the Queen of Sheba (Mt. 12: 42), Elijah's mission to the widow of Zarephath (Lk. iv. 26) and the healing of Naaman (Lk. 4: 27). Even radical critics admit that He believed in its historical truthfulness, and we may unhesitatingly do the same.

It is, nevertheless, not as history, but as revelation that these books are chiefly treated in the New Testament, and should be studied by the Christian. They are cited as revealing God's character in His deeds, His gracious promises from generation to generation, and His redemptive purpose in Christ, the Son of David; and finally they tell how the sending of His prophets and the rejection of their message (Mt. 21: 33-46) led on • to the sending of His Son.

Introducing Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel

Joshua

The book of Joshua consisting of twenty-four chapters, approximately the first half of the book is an extension of the history recorded in Deuteronomy; the remainder appears to have been added by authors of the Late Priestly History. The story of the conquest of Canaan is told briefly and in a manner that indicates that it was accomplished easily and within a relatively short period of time. The crossing of the Jordan River is attended by Yahweh's miraculous intervention, reminiscent of the crossing of the Red Sea that followed the Exodus from Egypt. In commemoration of the Jordan River crossing, twelve stones are taken from the river bed and erected as a monument. The first city to be attacked is Jericho, where the walls tumble down at the moment when trumpet blasts are heard. Because Achan steals a wedge of gold and a fine Babylonian garment, the Hebrews fail to capture the city of Ai. Not until punishment is meted out for Achan's sin does the city fall into the Hebrews' hands.

Joshua, in accordance with the instruction that he receives, gathers representatives of all the people in one place and delivers to them the statutes and ordinances given by Moses. In a battle with the Gibeonites, Joshua commands the sun and moon to stand still, with the result that the day is lengthened, thus enabling Joshua's forces to achieve a remarkable victory over their enemies. The latter chapters of the book describe the division of the land among the various tribes. The authors of this book were evidently interested in personalities. They had a very high regard for Joshua, ranking him as second only to Moses. The farewell address that this hero delivers before all Israel praises Yahweh for the victories that he has given and counsels the people to remain faithful to the god who has already done so much in their behalf.

Judges

Judges is a continuation of the history in Joshua, the Book of Judges' central theme is the settlement in the land of Canaan, a period that preceded the establishment of the monarchy. Although the leaders of the people were known

as judges, their chief function was not that of deciding cases of law but rather providing political and military leadership in times of crises. These crises occurred one after another in rapid succession, indicating quite clearly that after the death of Joshua, the situation that the Israelites faced was chaotic. Whenever conditions became intolerable, a leader would arise and deliver his people from the hands of the enemy. But the victory would never bring about anything more than temporary relief. Within a short time, a new crisis would develop and the cycle of events would be repeated. The first judge, or deliverer, was Othniel, who brought victory to the Israelites after they suffered eight years of oppression by the king of Mesopotamia. Then came Ehud, who delivered his people from the Moabites. Deborah, both a judge and a prophet, sent out a call to the various tribes to unite in a battle against the Canaanites. Responding to her call, the Israelites defeated the armies of Sisera at a battle at Megiddo. Gideon was another judge who delivered the people of Israel, this time from the Midianites. The story of Gideon is related at considerable length, for he is regarded as one of the better judges. As a result of his activities, the land is said to have had rest for a period of forty years. Jephthah was the judge who made a vow to Yahweh: If Yahweh would grant him victory in his war with the Ammonites, Jephthah would offer as a sacrifice whatever first came out of his house on his return home. The victory was achieved, and on his way home, he was met first by his own daughter. With great emotion, he told her of his vow and shortly thereafter carried it out.

Samson, one of the more prominent judges, tricked the Philistines on several occasions. At one time, he slew thousands of them with the jawbone of an ass. His affair with Delilah, who betrayed him to the Philistines, cost him his eyesight, but ultimately he was restored to Yahweh's favor and was able to pull down the temple that housed the Philistine god Dagon. Many other judges are mentioned, and some interesting stories are related concerning a few of them. The historian of this period was convinced that Israel should have had a different type of leadership and expresses this attitude in these words: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

1 and 2 Samuel

The two books of Samuel record an important transition in political organization. The period of the judges came to an end with Samuel, who is also referred to as a seer and a prophet, and who anointed Saul to be the first king of Israel. The history of the monarchy contained in these books is believed to have been compiled during the reign of King Josiah of Judah. Because of the reformation that he inaugurated, Josiah was regarded as a great king. Under his leadership, the aspirations for Israel's future hopefully would soon be realized,

for it seemed reasonable enough to suppose that Israel's troubles during the early period of the settlement in Canaan were due to the fact that the people had no king to rule over them, at least according to certain parts of Samuel. However, the story as we have it now is a bit confusing because the compiler of Samuel used some source materials that express an opposite idea. We are told that the establishment of the monarchy was a great achievement, but we also read that it was Israel's greatest mistake. According to the latter view, Samuel warned his people of the dangers involved in having a king, and only after their persistent demands did Yahweh relent and allow them to have their own way.

Because the career of Samuel marks an important transition point in the history of the Hebrew people, many stories concerning him are preserved. In 1 Samuel, we read that even before Samuel was born, he was dedicated to Yahweh. His birth was a miraculous event, for his mother, Hannah, had been childless. While only a small boy, Samuel was taken to the home of Eli, a priest, so that he might be reared under influences that would prepare him for his future work. One night, Yahweh called to Samuel and spoke a message of reproof that Samuel was to deliver to Eli. On another occasion, when the elders of Israel gathered for a consultation concerning their political future, they called upon Samuel to select someone to be anointed as king, but here we have two conflicting accounts: According to one account, Samuel protested vigorously against a movement of this kind; in the other account, Saul arrived at Samuel's house after a prolonged search for his father's lost animals, but Samuel was warned in advance of Saul's coming, and knowing that Yahweh's chosen leader was before him, Samuel made arrangements for him to be anointed as king. The brief account of Saul's reign also appears to be based on conflicting source materials. The most probable explanation for this conflict is that these sources were written by both supporters and detractors of the idea of a monarchy for Israel. Saul's disobedience in sparing the life of the Amalekite king, along with animals that were offered as sacrifices, was bitterly denounced by Samuel. This failure on the part of Saul is used as an introduction to the story of David. Samuel, in response to instruction that he received from Yahweh, went to the home of a certain Jesse who had several sons, one of whom was to be selected as king in place of Saul. David, although the youngest of Jesse's sons, was chosen. Eventually Saul became jealous of David, and his antagonism is illustrated in a number of different stories. 1 Samuel closes with an account of the war with the Philistines and Saul's tragic death on Mount Gilboa.

2 Samuel is concerned almost entirely with the career of David. An excerpt from the Book of Yashur the Upright reports a eulogy spoken by David in commemoration of Saul and Jonathan. An account is given of the way in which David was made king first over Judah and later over all of Israel. The story of

Abner, Saul's trusted general, is followed by a short poem, in which David expresses lamentation over the way in which Abner met his death. We are told how David captured the city of Jerusalem and made it the headquarters of his kingdom, how the ark was brought to Jerusalem, and how David achieved many victories. David's sin against Uriah is reported, as is the way in which he was reproved by Nathan the prophet. Absalom's rebellion is narrated at considerable length, and the book ends with the story of David's sin in numbering the people of Israel.

Analysis

The history that is recorded in these historical writings represents the points of view of post-exilic writers. In their accounts of the events that followed the entrance of the Hebrews into the land of Canaan, the writers were influenced by the religious ideals and practices current at the time when they lived. The primary purpose of the history is not to preserve an accurate record of what happened in the past but rather to emphasize the religious lessons that are illustrated in the course of events. The Deuteronomic law of the Central Sanctuary, the regulations embodied in the Holiness Code, and the detailed instructions of the Priests Code were considered extremely important for the preservation of the Hebrew religion. By projecting these ideals and institutions back to the early history of the Hebrew people, the writers intended to show that such codes and laws were not innovations invented by contemporary priests but rather were continuations of principles recognized as far back as the time of Moses. Further support for these institutions was provided by showing that the course of Hebrew history was determined primarily by the attitude of these people with regard to the requirements specified in these codes.

In writing their history, these Old Testament authors made use of older source materials, including the Book of the Wars of Yahweh, the Book of Yashur the Upright, "The Song of Deborah," and other fragments of the early literature available to them. The primitive character of some of these sources is understandable given that they were produced in an earlier age, going back as far as the period of the united kingdom and in some instances even earlier than that, which helps explain in part the strange and barbaric stories that are incorporated into the history. Actions that would not have been condoned at all in later times are related without any apparent censure or blame. In their original form, these sources represent a period of Hebrew history that preceded the teachings of the great prophets and the corresponding development of ethical ideals.

Because these sources were produced by men who held opposing views about such institutions as the establishment of the monarchy, we can see why

conflicting accounts of the same event are found side by side in the Old Testament history. In some instances, two different accounts are presented without any attempt to reconcile the disagreements. At other times, explanatory passages inserted by editors and copyists in an attempt to harmonize the accounts with one another are detectable. Despite these conflicts, throughout this history the underlying conception of a moral order characterizes the historical process. This moral order in the historic process illustrates what the Hebrew writers believed to be the divine element in history. Obedience to Yahweh's commands was certain to cause consequences quite different from the ones that were sure to follow disobedience of these same commands. To the prophetic historians, either obeying or disobeying Yahweh's directives meant choosing between life and death, respectively.

The Book of Joshua

Joshua might be called "The book of conquest and division," with reference to the events in Canaan it records. According to the marginal chronology it covers a period of how many years? Its character is that of a military campaign, and I have read a criticism of it from that point of view, which places Joshua in the very first rank of military commanders, classing him with the Caesars, and Hannibals, and Napoleons, and Wellingtons, and Grants of all ages. We know, of course, whence he secured his wonderful equipment, and are not surprised at this estimate of him, but it is interesting to have it come to us from another source.

The **Book of Joshua** (Hebrew: *Sefer Y'hoshua* ספר יהושע) is the sixth book in the Hebrew Bible and of the Old Testament. Its 24 chapters tell of the entry of the Israelites into Canaan, their conquest and division of the land under the leadership of Joshua, and of serving God in the land. Joshua forms part of the biblical history of the emergence of Israel which begins with the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, continues with their conquest of Canaan under their leader Joshua (the subject matter of the book of Joshua), and culminates in Judges with the settlement of the tribes in the land. The book is structured in two roughly equal parts, the story of the campaigns of the Israelites in central, southern and northern Canaan and the destruction of their enemies, followed by the division of the conquered land among the twelve tribes; the two parts are framed by set-piece speeches by God and Joshua commanding the conquest and at the end warning of the need for faithful obedience of the Law (*torah*) revealed to Moses.

Almost all scholars agree that the book of Joshua holds little historical value for early Israel and most likely reflects a much later period. Rather than being

written as history, the Deuteronomistic history – Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings – was intended to illustrate a theological scheme in which Israel and her leaders are judged by their obedience to the teachings and laws (the covenant) set down in the book of Deuteronomy.^[5] Although tradition holds that it was written by Joshua, it is probable that it was written by multiple editors and authors far removed from the time.^[6] The earliest parts of the book are possibly chapters 2–11, the story of the conquest; more certain is that this section was then incorporated into an early form of Joshua that was part of then original Deuteronomistic history, written late in the reign of king Josiah (reigned 640–609 BCE); it seems clear that the book was not completed until after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586, and possibly not until after the return from the Babylonian exile late in the 6th century.

Outline

I. Entry into the land and conquest of the land (1:1–12:24)

- A. Transfer of leadership to Joshua (1:1–18)
 - 1. God’s commission to Joshua (1:1–9)
 - 2. Joshua’s instructions to the people (1:10–18)
- B. Entrance into Canaan (2:1–5:15)
 - 1. Reconnaissance of Jericho (2:1–24)
 - 2. Crossing the Jordan (3:1–17)
 - 3. Establishing a foothold at Gilgal (4:1–5:1)
 - 4. Circumcision and Passover (5:2–15)
- C. Victory over Canaan (6:1–12:24)
 - 1. Destruction of Jericho (6)
 - 2. Failure and success at Ai (7:1–8:29)
 - 3. Renewal of the covenant at Mount Ebal (8:30–35)
 - 4. Other campaigns in central Palestine (9:1–27)
 - 5. Campaigns in southern Palestine (10:1–43)
 - 6. Campaigns in northern Palestine (11:1–23)
 - 7. Summary list of defeated kings (12:1–24)

II. Division of the land among the tribes (13:1–22:34)

- A. God’s instructions to Joshua (13:1–7)
- B. Tribal allotments (13:8–19:51)
 - 1. Eastern tribes (13:8–33)
 - 2. Western tribes (14:1–19:51)
- C. Cities of refuge and levitical cities (20:1–21:42)
- D. Summary of conquest (21:43–45)

E. Dismissal of the eastern tribes (serving YHWH in the land) (22:1–34)

III. Conclusion (23:1–24:33)

A. Joshua's farewell address (23:1–16)

B. Covenant at Shechem (24:1–28)

C. Deaths of Joshua and Eleazar; burial of Joseph's bones (24:29–33)^[3]

Summary

God's commission to Joshua (chapter 1)

(Chapter 1 is the first of three important moments in Joshua marked with major speeches and reflections by the main characters; here first God and then Joshua make speeches about the goal of conquest of the Promised Land; at chapter 12, Joshua looks back on the conquest; and at chapter 23 Joshua gives a speech about what must be done if Israel is to live in peace in the land).

God commissions Joshua to take possession of the land and warns him to keep faith with the Covenant. (God's speech foreshadows major themes of the book: the crossing of the Jordan and conquest of the land, its distribution, and the imperative need for obedience to the Law; Joshua's own immediate obedience is seen in his speeches to the Israelite commanders and to the Transjordanian tribes, and the Transjordanians' affirmation of Joshua's leadership echoes Yahweh's assurances of victory).

Entry into the land and conquest (chapters 2–12)

The Israelites cross the Jordan through the miraculous intervention of God and his ark and are circumcised at Gibeath-Haaraloth (translated as *hill of foreskins*), renamed Gilgal in memory (*Gilgal* sounds like *Gallothi*, *I have removed*, but is more likely to translate as *circle of standing stones*). The conquest begins in Canaan with Jericho, followed by Ai (central Canaan), after which Joshua builds an altar to Yahweh at Mt Ebal (northern Canaan) and renews the Covenant. (The covenant ceremony has elements of a divine land-grant ceremony, similar to ceremonies known from Mesopotamia).

The narrative now switches to the south. The Gibeonites trick the Israelites into entering into an alliance with them by saying they are not Canaanites; this prevents the Israelites from exterminating them, but they are enslaved instead. An alliance of Amorite kingdoms headed by the Canaanite king of Jerusalem is defeated with Yahweh's miraculous help, and the enemy kings are hanged on trees. (The Deuteronomist author may have used the then-recent 701 BCE

campaign of the Assyrian king Sennacherib in Judah as his model; the hanging of the captured kings is in accordance with Assyrian practice of the 8th century).

With the south conquered the narrative moves to the northern campaign. A powerful multi-national (or more accurately, multi-ethnic) coalition headed by the king of Hazor, the most important northern city, is defeated with Yahweh's help and Hazor captured and destroyed. Chapter 11:16-23 summarises the campaign: Joshua has taken the entire land, and the land "had rest from war." Chapter 12 lists the vanquished kings on both sides of the Jordan.

Division of the land (chapters 13–21)

Having described how the Israelites and Joshua have carried out the first of their God's commands, the story now turns to the second, to "put the people in possession of the land." This section is a "covenantal land grant": Yahweh, as king, is issuing each tribe its territory.^[12] The "cities of refuge" and Levitical cities are attached to the end, since it is necessary for the tribes to receive their grants before they allocate parts of it to others. The Transjordanian tribes are dismissed, affirming their loyalty to Yahweh.

Joshua's farewell (chapters 23–24)

Joshua charges the leaders of the Israelites to remain faithful to Yahweh and the covenant, warning of judgement should Israel leave Yahweh and follow other gods; Joshua meets with all the people and reminds them of Yahweh's great works for them, and of the need to love Yahweh alone. Joshua performs the concluding covenant ceremony, and send the people to their inheritance.

Composition

Tradition

Joshua, like most of the bible, is anonymous. The Babylonian Talmud was the first attempt to attach authors to the holy books: each book, according to the authors of the Talmud, was written by a prophet, and each prophet was an eyewitness of the events described, and Joshua himself wrote "the book that bears his name". This idea was already rejected as untenable by John Calvin (1509–1564), and by the time of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) it was recognised that the book must have been written much later than the period it depicted.

The Deuteronomistic history

There is now general agreement that Joshua was composed as part of a larger work, the Deuteronomistic history, stretching from Deuteronomy to Kings. In 1943 the German biblical scholar Martin Noth suggested that this history was composed by a single author/editor, living in the time of the Exile (6th century BCE). A major modification to Noth's theory was made in 1973 by the American scholar Frank M. Cross, to the effect that that two editions of the history could be distinguished, the first and more important from the court of king Josiah in the late 7th century, and the second Noth's 6th century Exilic history. At much the same time a second German scholar, Rudolf Smend, detected many more authors/editors than either Noth or Cross allowed for.

Sources and composition history of Joshua

Martin Noth believed that chapters 2–12 (the conquest) were based on a collection of conquest stories from the Benjamin region dating from the pre-monarchical period, edited in the 9th century to introduce a pan-Israel perspective with Joshua as the hero; four centuries later the Deuteronomist reworked this by adding an introduction (chapter 1) and conclusion (chapter 23); and chapters 13–22 (the division) were added last, by a non-Deuteronomist, who also added chapter 24 as a new conclusion.

Gordon Wenham has since demonstrated that the division chapters (chapters 13–22) in fact share a number of important themes with the book of Deuteronomy, meaning that they could have come from the Deuteronomist; and John Van Seters has argued for a whole series of additions to the book, mostly from Priestly authors.

Themes and genre

Joshua Commanding the Sun to Stand Still upon Gideon (John Martin)

Genre (historicity)

See also: History of ancient Israel and Judah

The prevailing scholarly view is that Joshua is not a factual account of historical events. The apparent setting of Joshua is the 13th century; this was a time of widespread city-destruction, but with a few exceptions (Hazor, Lachish) the destroyed cities are not the ones the Bible associates with Joshua, and the ones it does associate with him show little or no sign of even being occupied at the time.

Carolyn Pressler, in a recent commentary for the Westminster Bible Companion series, suggests that readers of Joshua should give priority to its theological message (“what passages teach about God”) and be aware of what these would have meant to audiences in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE. Richard Nelson explains: The needs of the centralised monarchy favoured a single story of origins combining old traditions of an exodus from Egypt, belief in a national god as “divine warrior,” and explanations for ruined cities, social stratification and ethnic groups, and contemporary tribes.

Themes

The overarching theological theme of the Deuteronomistic history is faithfulness (and its obverse, faithlessness) and God’s mercy (and its obverse, his anger). In Judges, Samuel and Kings Israel becomes faithless and God ultimately shows his anger by sending his people into exile, but in Joshua Israel is obedient, Joshua is faithful, and God fulfils his promise and gives them the land. Yahweh’s war campaign in Palestine validates Israel’s entitlement to the land and provides a paradigm of how Israel was to live there: twelve tribes, with a designated leader, united by covenant in warfare and in worship of Yahweh alone at single sanctuary, all in obedience to the commands of Moses as found in Deuteronomy.

God and Israel

Joshua takes forward Deuteronomy’s theme of Israel as a single people worshipping Yahweh in the land God has given them.^[28] Yahweh, as the main character in the book, takes the initiative in conquering the land, and it is Yahweh’s power that wins battles (for example, the walls of Jericho fall because Yahweh is fighting for Israel, not because the Israelites show superior fighting ability). The potential disunity of Israel is a constant theme, the greatest threat of disunity coming from the tribes east of the Jordan, and there is even a hint in chapter 22:19 that the land across the Jordan is unclean and the tribes who live there are of secondary status.

Land

Land is the central topic of Joshua. The introduction to Deuteronomy recalled how Yahweh had given the land to the Israelites but then withdrew the gift when Israel showed fear and only Joshua and Caleb had trusted in God. The land is Yahweh’s to give or withhold, and the fact that he has promised it to Israel gives Israel an inalienable right to take it. For exilic and post-exilic readers, the land was both the sign of Yahweh’s faithfulness and Israel’s unfaithfulness, as well

as the centre of their ethnic identity. In Deuteronomistic theology, “rest” meant Israel’s unthreatened possession of the land, the achievement of which began with the conquests of Joshua.

The enemy

Joshua “carries out a systematic campaign against the civilians of Canaan — men, women and children — that amounts to genocide.” In doing this he is carrying out *herem* as commanded by Yahweh in Deuteronomy 20:17: “You shall not leave alive anything that breathes.” The purpose is to drive out and dispossess the Canaanites, with the implication that there are to be no treaties with the enemy, no mercy, and no intermarriage. “The extermination of the nations glorifies Yahweh as a warrior and promotes Israel’s claim to the land,” while their continued survival “explores the themes of disobedience and penalty and looks forward to the story told in Judges and Kings.” The divine call for massacre at Jericho and elsewhere can be explained in terms of cultural norms (Israel wasn’t the only Iron Age state to practice *herem*) and theology (a measure to ensure Israel’s purity as well as the fulfilment of God’s promise), but Patrick D. Miller in his commentary on Deuteronomy remarks, “there is no real way to make such reports palatable to the hearts and minds of contemporary readers and believers.”

Obedience

Obedience vs. disobedience is a constant theme. Obedience ties in the Jordan crossing, the defeat of Jericho and Ai, circumcision and Passover, and the public display and reading of the Law. Disobedience appears in the story of Achan (stoned for violating the *herem* command), the Gibeonites, and the altar built by the Transjordan tribes. Joshua’s two final addresses challenge the Israel of the future (the readers of the story) to obey the most important command of all, to worship Yahweh and no other gods. Joshua thus illustrates the central Deuteronomistic message, that obedience leads to success and disobedience to ruin.

Moses, Joshua and Josiah

The Deuteronomistic history draws parallels in proper leadership between Moses, Joshua and Josiah. God’s commission to Joshua in chapter 1 is framed as a royal installation, the people’s pledge of loyalty to Joshua as successor Moses recalls royal practices, the covenant-renewal ceremony led by Joshua was the prerogative of the kings of Judah, and God’s command to Joshua to meditate on the “book of the law” day and night parallels the description of Josiah in 2 Kings

23:25 as a king uniquely concerned with the study of the law — not to mention their identical territorial goals (Josiah died in 609 BCE while attempting to annex the former Israel to his own kingdom of Judah).

Some of the parallels with Moses can be seen in the following, and not exhaustive, list:

- Joshua sent spies to scout out the land near Jericho (2:1), just as Moses sent spies from the wilderness to scout out the Promised Land (Num. 13; Deut. 1:19–25).
- Joshua led the Israelites out of the wilderness into the Promised Land, crossing the Jordan River as if on dry ground (3:16), just as Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt through the Red Sea, which they crossed as if on dry land (Ex. 14:22).
- After crossing the Jordan River, the Israelites celebrated the Passover (5:10–12) just as they did immediately before the Exodus (Ex. 12).
- Joshua's vision of the "commander of Yahweh's army" (5:13–15) is reminiscent of the divine revelation to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:1–6).
- Joshua successfully intercedes on behalf of the Israelites when Yahweh is angry for their failure to fully observe the "ban" (herem), just as Moses frequently persuaded God not to punish the people (Ex. 32:11–14, Num. 11:2, 14:13–19).
- Joshua and the Israelites were able to defeat the people at Ai (Bible) because Joshua followed the divine instruction to extend his sword (Josh 8:18), just as the people were able to defeat the Amalekites as long as Moses extended his hand that held "the staff of God" (Ex. 17:8–13).
- Joshua served as the mediator of the renewed covenant between Yahweh and Israel at Shechem (8:30–35; 24), just as Moses was the mediator of Yahweh's covenant with the people at Mount Sinai/Mount Horeb.
- Before his death Joshua delivered a farewell address to the Israelites (23–24), just as Moses had delivered his farewell address (Deut. 32–33).

Christ in the Book of Joshua

One of my goals in writing and preaching is to one day complete thirty-nine messages or series of messages on the subject of Christ Jesus in each of the Old Testament books. Why Joshua? Well, I've been studying Joshua in preparation for a series of articles on leadership and ministry. That series has been frustratingly slow to come together, but in the process I've been deeply impressed at how Jesus is portrayed in this book. We have three wonderful glimpses of Jesus within the 24 chapters of Joshua.

So will you turn with me please to Joshua, chapter 1.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

From time to time, most Christians are plagued with little arrows of doubt about the truthfulness and veracity of their faith. How do we know the Bible is true? How do we know that Jesus Christ is God made flesh? What proof do we have?

Jesus said, "If you want evidence that I'm who I claim to be, search the Scriptures." And by "Scriptures," He meant the Old Testament, for those were the only Scriptures of His day. On the Emmaus Road in Luke 24, he said to the doubting disciples, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Someone said that Jesus Christ pervades the Old Testament the way salt pervades the ocean. If so, we should be able to get a glimpse of Jesus in the book of Joshua. And we do, in three ways.

In Joshua Himself

First, we see Jesus in Joshua Himself, who was a type of Christ. How do we know? Because our Lord Jesus Christ was named the same name as this great Old Testament leader. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew Joshua.

Now, Joshua was not Joshua's original name. Look with me at Numbers 13. In this chapter, Moses selected twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan in preparation for the Israelite invasion. The names of the twelve men are listed.

The Lord said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders." So at the Lord's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. These are their names... from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun..."

Now, verse 16: *These are the names of the men Moses sent to explore the land. Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.*

Why did he do that? Most commentators are mystified. The two names are very similar. Hoshea in the Hebrew means *May Jehovah Save*. Joshua means *Jehovah Is Salvation*. It seems to me that Moses was led by God to strengthen Hoshea's name to make it more solid, more durable, more certain, more dogmatic, as a personal name for the coming Messiah: Jehovah Is Salvation. Here is one who is God Himself who has come to save His people.

And these two men not only share the same name, but a similar task. Joshua took over after the giver of the law had died, and he led the people into the future that God had planned and designed for them. The Bible teacher Paul Van Gorder¹ points out,

The book begins with the words, "Now after the death of Moses..." Moses represented the law. The people could not enter the land of Canaan until Moses was dead. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit (Rom 8:3,4).... Joshua led the children of Israel to victory after crossing the Jordan. He was their advocate in time of defeat. It was Joshua who allotted them their portions within the land. All of this beautifully pictures the work of the Lord.

Rahab's Crimson Cord

Now, there is a second picture of Jesus in the book of Joshua, and it is found in a coil of scarlet roping that plays a prominent role in the story of Rahab the prostitute in Joshua 2. In this passage, the children of Israel, still on the east bank of the Jordan, are massing for the invasion; but Joshua, being a shrewd and

¹ Paul Van Gorder began writing regularly for *Our Daily Bread* in 1969 and continued until 1992. He also served as associate Bible teacher for the *Day of Discovery* television program and traveled extensively as a speaker for Radio Bible Class. He went home to be with the Lord in September 2009.

wise general, still needed some advance military intelligence. So he secretly sent two spies on a three-day mission into the Promised Land. They secretly entered the city of Jericho, but something went badly wrong and their covers were blown. The city authorities mobilized to track them down and kill them, but a prostitute named Rahab took them in and hid them. Her heart was hungry for God, and she recognized these men as representatives of God.

She had a crimson cord which she tied to the window of her house, which was attached to the city wall, so that the men could rappel down the wall and escape. She said to them, "I know that you are going to capture this city. I know that God is with you. When you do, I beg that you'll spare me, my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them. Save us from death."

Their response is in verse 14: *"Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land." So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. Now she had said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way." The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him.*

Verse 21: *"Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.*

What a picture of Christ. Judgment is coming. The Bible says that the world is about to be invaded by the judgment of God. Acts 17:30-31 says that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained."

There is only one place where we may find safety and deliverance. Just as the Israelites were told to remain in their houses with the crimson blood of the Lamb painted on the door posts, just as Rahab was told to remain in her room with the crimson cord tied to the window, so we must be under the protecting, saving power of the crimson blood of Christ.

There's an old song that says:

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! Precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;

No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Now, can you imagine how diligently Rahab sought to get her loved ones into that room? The invasion was imminent, and nothing else mattered to her except to get her father and mother, her brothers and sisters and their children into that upper room. It's the same sort of diligence we see in the apostle Paul as he scurried about the Roman Empire, begging everyone he met to come to Christ for salvation. It's a picture of the burden we should have for our own loved ones who know not Christ.

The Captain of the Lord's Host

We also see Jesus in what I believe is a special pre-incarnate appearance in Joshua 5. This is one of the most unusual scenes in the Old Testament. After the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and prepared to fight for the city of Jericho, the Lord Jesus Himself—God the Son—left the throne of heaven for a few moments to impress something on the one who would later be His earthly namesake. Look at Joshua 5:13ff:

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in His hand. Joshua went up to Him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

"Neither," He replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown on the ground in reverence and asked Him, "What message does my Lord have for His servant."

The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

There are two things to notice here. First, the identity of this strange commander. Why do I say that this is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ? By pre-incarnate appearance, I mean that Jesus came down to earth in the form of a human being before He actually became a human being at Bethlehem. Jesus Christ, being God, has always existed as God. He existed in

Old Testament days. The prophet Micah tells us that His comings and goings are from old, even from eternity. We're also given the indication in the Bible that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit remain invisible, but it is one of the jobs of God the Son to manifest the presence of God to His creation. John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (Son), who is at the Father's side, has made Him known."

So there are several times in the Old Testament when we get glimpses of the physical, literal appearance of Jesus Christ prior to His birth in Bethlehem, and theologians call these sightings under a special name—Christophonies.

But notice in this passage the strange message. When Joshua realized that He was speaking with the Lord Himself, he asked, "What message to you have for me? What do I need to know?"

We would have thought that the Commander of the Lord's Hosts would give him some military instruction or some spiritual insight. Instead the only message is: "Take off your shoes. The place where you are standing is holy."

What can we glean from that? Look back at chapter 1. In the introduction of the book, in the initial set of instructions that God gives to Joshua, He reminds him of His constant, abiding Presence:

No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you—verse 5

The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go—verse 9

The pillar of cloud may have vanished. The column of fire may no longer be seen. Moses is dead. But I have not gone anywhere. My presence is just as real and just as near and just as powerful as it ever was. The angelic armies are hovering unseen over your head. Wherever you are is holy, because I am with you.

The Lord Jesus wants us to regard wherever we are as a holy place, because He is with us. Your living room is holy ground, for when you are there, Jesus is there. Your bedroom is holy ground. Your office at work is a holy place when you are there, for Christ is there with you.

Brother Lawrence, the Carmelite mystic, was assigned to the monastery kitchen, and he was unhappy there until he realized one day that even the most menial

tasks, if undertaken for God's glory, are holy; and wherever the Christian stands--even in a hot, thankless kitchen--is holy ground, for the Lord is there, too.

It was said about Brother Lawrence *that in the great hurry of business in the kitchen he still preserved his recollection and heavenly-mindedness. He was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit.*

"The time of business," said the Brother, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

And Joshua went forth with a newfound confidence, knowing that even if he could not see the Lord, the Lord was there, present, hovering near with His divine armies, ready to fight on his behalf, even as our Lord Jesus Christ said as He ascended into heaven, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*

And so we see Jesus in Joshua...

Through the man Joshua himself whose name made him a prototype of the Coming Messiah: Jehovah is Salvation;

Through the scarlet cord signifying the saving power of the blood of Christ;

Through the mysterious Captain of the armies of God whose presence is near us. Whenever Jesus is with us wherever we are standing is holy ground.

These three glimpses of Jesus in Joshua are given to us over a thousand years before our Lord's birth in Bethlehem. Today I'm going to ask you to put your trust in Jesus Christ. His name, His blood, and His presence are available to you right now.

The Book of Judges

The story of the book of Judges is something like this : While Joshua and the elders of that generation lived, (those who had personally known the wonders of Jehovah), the people continued in measurable obedience to the divine law. But when they died, and another generation came on the scene, there was a steady decline. They had made the way easy for this, by failing to drive out all the Canaanites from amongst them, as we saw in the last chapter. The proximity of these corrupt heathen people began to act 1.1e leaven in the dough. Israel intermarried with them, and by degrees was led into idolatry by them. This

weakened their power so that from conquerors they became the conquered. They turned their back upon God, who, in a sense, turned His back upon them, allowing them to be taken captive by their enemies, and sorely oppressed. In their distress they would repent and cry out unto Him, when He would deliver them through the instrumentality of some man, miraculously endued, called a judge. As long as this man lived they would be held in obedience, but on his decease a relapse into sin would follow, and the same round of experience be repeated.

The Book of Judges (Hebrew: *Sefer Shoftim* שופטים) is the seventh book of the Hebrew bible and the Christian Old Testament. Its title describes its contents: it contains the history of Biblical judges, divinely inspired leaders whose direct knowledge of Yahweh allows them to act as champions for the Israelites from oppression by foreign rulers, and models of wise and faithful behaviour required of them by their god Yahweh following the exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan. The events of *Judges* are set “between c. 1380 [B.C.E.] and the rise of Saul, c. 1050.” The stories follow a consistent pattern: the people are unfaithful to Yahweh and he therefore delivers them into the hands of their enemies; the people repent and entreat Yahweh for mercy, which he sends in the form of a leader or champion (a “judge”); the judge delivers the Israelites from oppression and they prosper. Soon they fall again into unfaithfulness and the cycle is repeated.

Judges forms part of Deuteronomistic history, a theologically-oriented history of Israel from the entry into Canaan to the destruction of the Temple. The details of this history’s composition are still widely debated, but most scholars place its origins, or at least its final form, in the 6th century BCE and the community of the Babylonian exile. Nevertheless, fragments of *Judges* (such as the Song of Deborah) have been dated from much earlier, perhaps close to the period the book depicts.

can be divided into three major sections: a double prologue (chapters 1:1-3:6), a main body (3:7-16:31), and a double epilogue (17-21).

Prologue

The book opens with the Israelites in the land which God has promised to them but worshipping “foreign gods” instead of Yahweh, the god of Israel, and with the Canaanites still present everywhere. Chapters 1:1-2:5 are thus a confession of failure; chapters 2:6-3:6 are a major summary and reflection from the Deuteronomists, setting out the overall formula which the stories in the main text will follow: Israel “does evil in the eyes of Yahweh;” the people are given into the hands of their enemies and cry out to Yahweh; Yahweh raises up a

leader; the “spirit of Yahweh” comes upon the leader, the enemy is defeated, and peace is regained.

Main text

Next comes the main text (3:11-16:31), six stories each concerning a major judge and their struggles against the oppressive kings of surrounding nations, plus the story of Abimelech, an Israelite who oppresses his own people. The cyclic pattern set out in the prologue is readily apparent at the beginning, but as the stories progress it begins to disintegrate, mirroring the disintegration of the world of the Israelites.

- Othniel (3:9-11) vs. Cushan-Rishathaim, King of Aram; Israel has 40 years peace until the death of Othniel. (The statement that Israel has a certain period of peace after each judge is a recurrent theme)
- Ehud (3:11-29) vs. Eglon of Moab
- Deborah the prophetess and Barak the army leader (4-5) vs. Jabin of Hazor (a city in Canaan) and Sisera, his captain
- Gideon (6-8) vs. Midian, Amalek, and the “children of the East” (apparently desert tribes)
- Abimelech (9) (who is traditionally counted as a king not a judge, and is considered evil) vs. all the Israelites who oppose him
- Jephthah (11-12:7) vs. the Ammonites
- Samson (13-16) vs. the Philistines

There are also brief glosses on “minor” judges: Shamgar (3:31), Tola and Jair (10:1-5), Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15). Some scholars have inferred that the minor judges were actual adjudicators, whereas the major judges were leaders and didn’t actually make legal judgements. The only time a major judge is said to have made legal judgments was Deborah (4:4). There are six minor judges and six major judges; this brings the total number of judges to twelve, the same number as there are tribes of Israel.

Epilogue

The book concludes with two appendices (17:1-21:25), stories which do not feature a specific judge:

- Dan and the Idols of Micah (17-18), how the tribe of Dan conquers its territory in the north
- Gibeah and the Levite Concubine (19-21), a war between Benjamin and the other tribes.

By the end of Judges the Israelites are in a worse condition than they were at the beginning, with Yahweh's treasures used to make idolatrous images, the Levites (priests) corrupted, the tribe of Dan conquering a remote village instead of the Canaanite cities, and the tribes of Israel making war on the Benjamites, their own brothers. Despite their appearance at the end of the *Book of Judges*, certain characters (like Jonathan, the grandson of Moses) and idioms present in the epilogue show that the therein "must have taken place ... early in the period of the judges."

Composition

Sources

The basic source for Judges was a collection of loosely connected stories about tribal heroes who saved the people in battle. This original "book of saviours," made up of the stories of Ehud, Jael and parts of Gideon, had already been enlarged and transformed into "wars of Yahweh" before being given the final Deuteronomistic revision. In the 20th century the first part of the prologue (chapters 1:1-2:5) and the two parts of the epilogue (17-21) were commonly seen as miscellaneous collections of fragments tacked on to the main text, and the second part of the prologue (2:6-3:6) as an introduction composed expressly for the book; this view has been challenged in the latter decades of the century, and there is an increasing willingness to see Judges as the work of a single individual, working by carefully selecting, reworking and positioning his source material to introduce and conclude his themes. A statement repeated throughout the book, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes," implies a monarchist redaction. The epilogue, in which Judah is assigned a leadership role twice, implies pro-Judah political leanings on the part of the author.

The Deuteronomistic history

Since the second half of the 20th century most scholars have agreed with Martin Noth's thesis that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings form parts of a single work. Noth maintained that the history was written in the early Exilic period (6th century BCE) in order to demonstrate how Israel's history was worked out in accordance with the theology expressed in the book of Deuteronomy (which thus provides the name "Deuteronomistic"). Noth believed that this history was the work of a single author, living in the mid-6th century BCE, selecting, editing and composing from his sources to produce a coherent work.^[21] Frank Moore Cross later proposed that an early version of the history was composed in Jerusalem in Josiah's time (late 7th century); this first

version, Deuteronomy 1, was then revised and expanded to create a second edition, that identified by Noth, and which Cross labelled Deuteronomy 2.

Scholars agree that the Deuteronomists' hand can be seen in *Judges* through the book's cyclical nature: the Israelites fall into idolatry, God punishes them for their sins with oppression by foreign peoples, the Israelites cry out to God for help, and God sends a judge to deliver them from the foreign oppression. After a brief period of peace, the cycle repeats. Scholars also suggest that the Deuteronomists also included the humorous and sometimes disparaging commentary found in the book such as the story of the Ephraimite who could not pronounce the word "*shibboleth*" correctly (Judg. 16)

Themes and genre

The essence of Deuteronomistic theology is that Israel has entered into a covenant (a treaty, a binding agreement) with the god Yahweh, under which they agree to accept Yahweh as their god (hence the phrase "god of Israel") and Yahweh promises them a land where they can live in peace and prosperity. Deuteronomy contains the laws by which Israel is to live in the promised land, Joshua chronicles the conquest of Canaan, the promised land, and its allotment among the tribes, Judges describes the settlement of the land, Samuel the consolidation of the land and people under David, and Kings the destruction of kingship and loss of the land. The final tragedy described in Kings is the result of Israel's failure to uphold its part of the covenant: faithfulness to Yahweh brings success, economic, military and political, but unfaithfulness brings defeat and oppression. This is the theme played out in Judges: the people are unfaithful to Yahweh and he therefore delivers them into the hands of their enemies; the people then repent and entreat Yahweh for mercy, which he sends in the form of a judge; the judge delivers the Israelites from oppression, but after a while they fall into unfaithfulness again and the cycle is repeated.

Further themes are also present: the "sovereign freedom of Yahweh" (God does not always do what is expected of him); the "satirisation of foreign kings" (who consistently underestimate Israel and Yahweh); the concept of the "flawed agent" (judges who are not adequate to the task before them) and the disunity of the Israelite community (which gathers pace as the stories succeed one another).

The book is as intriguing for the themes it leaves out as for what it includes: the ark of the covenant, which is given so much importance in the stories of Moses and Joshua, is almost entirely missing, cooperation between the various tribes is limited, and there is no mention of a central shrine for worship or of a high priest (the office to which Aaron was appointed at the end of the Exodus story).

Although *Judges* probably had a monarchist redaction (see above), the book contains passages and themes that represent anti-monarchist views. One of the major themes of the book is Yahweh's sovereignty and the importance of being loyal to Him and His laws above all other gods and sovereigns. Anti-monarchist theology is most apparent toward the end of the Gideon cycle in which the Israelites beg Gideon to create a dynastic monarchy over them and Gideon refuses.^[28] The rest of Gideon's lifetime saw peace in the land, but after Gideon's death, his son Abimelech ruled Shechem as a Machiavellian tyrant guilty for much bloodshed (see chapters 8 and 9).

Judges is remarkable for the number of female characters who "play significant roles, active and passive, in the narratives."^[11] Rabbi Joseph Telushkin wrote, "Most of the great women in the Bible either are married to a great man or related to one. ... A rare exception to this tradition is the prophetess and judge Deborah, perhaps the Bible's greatest woman figure. Deborah stands exclusively on her own merits. The only thing we know about her personal life is the name of her husband, Lapidot."

Theology and History in Joshua and Judges

I. Introduction

The term *biblical theology* can be used in different ways. Although the usage adopted in this volume focuses on a special *method* of theological study, it should be understood that the term is widely used to refer to a *movement* that is basically antagonistic to evangelical faith. This negative usage is here considered and discarded before the legitimate meaning of biblical theology is discussed.

First of all, then, this expression is used to describe the biblical theology *movement*. This was an outgrowth of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. It began with the publication of Walther Eichrodt's first volume of Old Testament theology in 1933 and ended with the publication of von Rad's second volume of Old Testament theology in 1960. Brevard Childs suggests the movement experienced its demise in May 1963 with the publication of John A. T. Robinson's *Honest To God*.

The movement initially was a reaction to liberalism and sought a return to an exegetical study of the Scriptures, particularly emphasizing a study of biblical words. Kittel's monumental ten-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* is an outgrowth of that. As a movement, however, it never separated itself from its liberal underpinnings; it retained the historical-critical methodology. For example, in studying the gospels, adherents of the biblical

theology movement applied the historical-critical methodology in attempting to discover which of the words attributed to Christ were actually spoken by Him.

While the movement recognized the weak message of liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it retained the liberal presuppositions concerning the Bible. Adherents held to the neo-orthodox view of revelation, taught evolution as a theory of origins, and emphasized the human aspect of the Bible rather than the divine. As a result, the movement was self-defeating. It was impossible to do a serious, exegetical study of the Scriptures while at the same time denying the authority of the Scriptures.

A second way in which the term *biblical theology* is used is for that *methodology* that takes its material in an historically oriented manner from the Old and New Testaments and arrives at a theology. It is exegetical in nature, drawing its material from the Bible as opposed to a philosophical understanding of theology; it stresses the historical circumstances in which doctrines were propounded; it examines the theology within a given period of history (as in Noahic or Abrahamic eras) or of an individual writer (as Pauline or Johannine writings).

Biblical theology in the above-defined sense may be called "that branch of theological science which deals systematically with the historically conditioned progress of the self-revelation of God as deposited in the Bible."

Several elements are important to observe in this definition•4

Systematisation

Biblical theology investigates the periods of history in which God has revealed Himself or the doctrinal emphases of the different biblical writers are set forth in a systematic fashion. Biblical theology, while presented in a systematized form, is distinct from systematic theology that assimilates truth from the entire Bible and from outside the Scriptures in systematizing biblical doctrine. Biblical theology is narrower. It concentrates on the emphasis of a given period of history as in the Old Testament or on the explicit teaching of a particular writer as in the New Testament.

History

Biblical theology pays attention to the important historical circumstances in which the biblical doctrines were given. What can be learned from the Old Testament era of revelation? What were the circumstances in the writing of Matthew or John? What were the circumstances of the addressees of the letter to the Hebrews? These are important questions that help resolve the doctrinal emphasis of a particular period or of a specific writer.

Progress of Revelation

An orthodox doctrine that evangelicals have long held is the belief in progressive revelation; God did not reveal all truth about Himself at one time but revealed Himself "piecemeal," portion by portion to different people throughout history (cf. Heb. 1:1). Biblical theology traces that progress of revelation, noting the revelation concerning Himself that God has given in a particular era or through a particular writer. Hence, God's self-disclosure was not as advanced to Noah and Abraham as it was to Isaiah. An earlier book of the New Testament, such as James, reflects a more primitive view of the church than books written later, such as the pastoral epistles.

Biblical in Nature

In contrast to systematic theology, which draws its information about God from any and every source, biblical theology has a narrower focus, drawing its information from the Bible (and from historical information that expands or clarifies the historical events of the Bible). Biblical theology thus is exegetical in nature, examining the doctrines in the various periods of history or examining the words and statements of a particular writer. This enables the student to determine the self-disclosure of God at a given period of history.

There has been much debate over the relationship of the Old Testament books of Joshua and Judges, especially in terms of their reliability as historical documents. Unfortunately, the historical issues have tended to dominate most discussion of the books and have made it difficult in some cases to read the books in terms of discerning theological intent. On the other hand, many people simply are not aware of the historical issues within the books, either because of a lack of familiarity with the details of the books or because certain views of Scripture have prevented asking historical questions. This can lead not only to an unreasonable naiveté about the complexity of Israel's early history, but also to a distorted perception of what the traditions actually say about God and his relationship with his people.

We should not ignore the historical issues or pretend they are not as severe as they are. Honesty in biblical study compels us to ask the historical questions and use all the available methods at our disposal to address those questions. But then neither should we allow those historical issues to obscure what the traditions might be saying in terms of confession about God, as Scripture for the Church. Scripture is not a book of history that only recites the facts. Finally, it is a book of Faith that bears witness to us of God's work in human history, and what that meant in the lives of people, and through that what it means for us. So, here we will briefly survey some of the historical issues in these two books, look at a

sampling of historical solutions as well as some of the literary perspectives, and then propose a theological reading of the books that does not place the historical issues as central. That theological reading will arise more from the literary dynamic of the two books as part of the larger biblical witness rather than on any final solution of the historical issues.

From the beginning, we should distinguish the kinds of questions that we will ask of the biblical text and not confuse them. If we ask historical questions, such as questions of when, or where, or how, then the methods that we use to investigate those questions will need to be tools that will produce answers to those historical questions. Likewise, if we ask theological questions, tools that help us seek answers of data will not likely help us find the theological message of the writings. It is not that these methods are not complimentary; it is that each of them serves a different purpose. The greatest danger is that we will ask one set of questions, for example questions of history, and then assume that because we have answered theologically what the text says about God that we have also answered the data questions about history.

Yet, historical questions produce historical answers while theological questions produce theological answers. We might ask, "when did this happen?" If by using methods of historical investigation we conclude that a certain time period was 1290-1050, this does not say anything about the theological confession about God to which the same passages may bear witness. We may debate the date, how we arrived at it, evidence to support a different date, or even question whether they kept time in the same way that we do. But the answer to that question of date does not tell us anything about the Israelites' testimony to God (theology).

It is true that some of those historical answers may raise questions about some of the theological assumptions we often make about the text. But that is one of the roles of the historical questions, to bring to light inadequate or mistaken linking of theological and historical concerns.

On the other hand, it should be stated clearly that nothing that will be said here about the historical questions will ever challenge the fundamental assumption of the Old Testament, that God revealed himself in real human history in real times and places. The Bible cannot be divorced from that thorough historical grounding, which keeps in from becoming just another set of myths about cosmic gods who have no real connection to human history. The biblical confession is unequivocal and consistent that God acts in human history, and that the Scripture of the Old (and for Christians the New) Testament bear faithful witness to that revelation.

That confession demands that we set the biblical witness against the background of human history. By that very nature of being historical it also compels us to ask historical questions. And yet, the message of Scripture is not that history. It is that distinction that will help us hear both the historical and theological dimensions of these books.

II. The Historical Issues in Joshua and Judges

Both books recount the story of Israel's settlement in the land of Canaan and their first couple of centuries in the land. The first half of Joshua describes the actual entry of the Israelites into the land and the early battles for control of key cities (1-12). The second half of the book details how the land was divided among the tribes of Israel (13-22), as well as a concluding covenant ceremony in which the people committed themselves to the worship of God (23-24).

The Book of Judges tells us of continued struggles in the land as local tribal chieftains or warlords (Heb: *shophet*, pl. *shophtim*, "judge") led isolated campaigns to free the Israelites from recurrent oppression at the hands of surrounding people. The book is organized in regular cycles that mark the rise of new leaders, a cycle given in outline form early in the book (2:10-23). The stories of Gideon and the consequences of his leadership (6-9), Samson and the ongoing struggle against the Philistines (13-16), as well as a general summary of Israel's intertribal fighting that nearly destroyed them (17-21) occupies over one half of the book. Without careful reading, the two books appear as a sequential narrative of Israel's rise to power as a dominant force in Canaan. This has been the traditional view of the books, that they recounted an orderly chronological account of the conquest of Palestine by the Israelites. The very idea of a "conquest" of the land has become a traditional way of describing Israel's entry into the land.

Yet there are obvious hints that the two books may not be as straightforwardly sequential as they appear from a casual reading. For example, after telling of an almost unbroken chain of victories over the Canaanites, the Book of Joshua concludes by reporting the death and burial of Joshua (24:29-30). The Book of Judges begins by reinforcing this sequential narrative: "After the death of Joshua. . ." (1:1). There follows a long list of defeats and setbacks, including the threat of syncretism with the worship of Ba'al practiced by the inhabitants of the land, with the implication that this happened following Joshua's death. Yet the second chapter of Judges still has Joshua leading the people during these defeats and only later reports his death (2:8-10). On a historical level this suggests that these are at least partially overlapping accounts of the same time

period, adapted to a schematized or patterned presentation of history to emphasize theological themes.

An even closer examination of the two books reveals a much more complex situation that raises both historical and theological questions, not only about the reliability of the accounts as straightforward history but also about the very nature of Israel's entry into Palestine. The debates surrounding this issue have been intense and at times acrimonious, ranging from those who deny any historical validity to the accounts to those who insist that every detail of the accounts is absolutely and totally accurate. There have been agendas applied to the issue from both directions, with some using a denial of the possibility of anything miraculous occurring as a basis to deny the historical accuracy, to other using an idea of the inerrancy of Scripture to assert absolute accuracy.

In between these two extremes are biblical scholars and historians who try to evaluate the actual biblical texts in order to understand what the texts themselves communicate. Using both the methods of historical investigation and the tools of biblical study, they have attempted to understand the biblical texts on their own terms apart from the dogmas and ideologies of either side. It is that endeavour that we will survey here.

A. The Perspective of the Book of Joshua

1. The Lightning Conquest of Joshua 1-12

On the surface, the book of Joshua seems to present the Israelite entry into Canaan as a single campaign of unified Israel under the command of Joshua. The invasion appears very "clean." The Israelites entered from the east, quickly subdued the closest Canaanite cities, and then moved into the central highlands around Shechem.

After celebrating the early victories at Jericho and Ai, and making alliances with some of the Canaanites (Gibeonites), they spread out through the land as a unified army, first to the South and then to the North. In lightning raids against the Canaanite strongholds that virtually wiped out the Canaanite inhabitants (11:20), Joshua and the army of "all Israel" took the entire land leaving little but mop-up operations and the task of dividing the conquered territory between the twelve tribes. The Israelites enjoyed peace and security as the last rested from war. (10:40-42; 11:14-20, 23; 12:7; cf. also 18:1, 10; 21:43-45; 23:1). At the conclusion of the conquest narratives, a thematic verse summarizes this section of the book (11:23):

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

There is some archaeological evidence that seems to confirm Joshua's version of a rapid conquest of the land. For example, there are a number of Canaanite fortress cities that are listed in the Joshua account as destroyed or taken by Joshua and the unified Israelite army: Hazor (11:10, 14), Lachish (10:31-32), Debir (10:38-39), and Eglon (10:34-35). Excavations at some of these Canaanite cities show evidence of a massive destruction followed by new occupation levels, which would be consistent with a sudden invasion. Also, cities *not* listed as captured, or specifically listed as *not* taken show little if any evidence of destruction.

2. Echoes of Other Memories in the Book of Joshua

Yet even within the Joshua traditions there are accounts that seemingly conflict with the idea of a rapid and total conquest. On the one hand, there are sweeping statements about Israel's total victory over all the inhabitants of the land (10:40-42):

So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.

"These kings and their land," in the context of this chapter refers specifically to King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem (10:1), King Hoham of Hebron, King Piram of Jarmuth, King Japhia of Lachish, and King Debir of Eglon (10:3). However, there are cities, such as Jerusalem, as well as others that are listed as taken or included within the boundaries of the tribes that raise other difficulties. In fact, the "clean" conquest that appears on the surface of the book of Joshua becomes increasingly difficult as the book is probed more deeply.

In spite of the overall impression, a closer reading of the details of the Joshua account reveals that the book actually tells us about only limited conquests of Canaanite territory, mainly in the territory of Benjamin (Jericho), Judah (Hebron, Debir), and Naphtali (Hazor). In fact, the first nine chapters of Joshua recount only the capture of two cities (Jericho and Ai), and the settlement of the

territory of Gibeah by making an alliance with the Canaanites who lived there. Chapters 10-11 only briefly recount all the other conquests. Yet these are mostly the battles between Israel and the kings of Canaanite city-states who banded together to try to stop Israel's entry into the land.

There are no reports about conquests in the central highlands of Ephraim (Shiloh, Bethel) and Manasseh (Shechem), even though this was the "staging ground" for the early tribal conquests (8:30-35, 18:1 ff; cf. 24:1-28). The Israelites simply moved into this territory, even though it is obvious from the presence of ancient Ba'al shrines at important cities and throughout the area that it had been inhabited for some time. Most of the battles recounted are on the fringes of the territory as they entered the land, or are against Canaanites who were making retaliatory raids against the Israelites as they settled into the central highlands surrounding Shechem (ch. 10-11).

While the northern conquests seem to go better, the battles in the South, along the coasts, and around the Megiddo Plain (Plain of Esdraelon and the Valley of Jezreel) do not seem nearly as successful as some of the lists and accounts in some places of Joshua indicate. For example, the list of conquered cities in chapter 12 includes some that Samuel and Kings report were not taken until the time of David and Solomon some 200-250 years later (Jerusalem, Gezer, Taanach, Megiddo, Dor). Other passages outside the city lists, both within Joshua and in other traditions, acknowledge that these cities were not taken in Joshua's time but came under Israelite control much later. Even the Joshua tradition knows that the Israelites did not take Jerusalem in the time of Joshua: (15:63)

But the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people could not drive out; so the Jebusites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.

This is confirmed in 2 Samuel where the capture of Jebus from the Jebusites, the city that would become Jerusalem, is a key event in the account of David's reign as King (5:6-7):

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites. . .
David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.

And yet, the defeat of the king of Jerusalem and the incorporation of Jerusalem into the tribal territory is mentioned in Joshua both in the battle reports (ch. 10) and in the list of cities captured by all Israel under the leadership of Joshua (12:10, 18:28). Likewise, Joshua reports that the king of Gezer was defeated by

all Israel (10:33, 12:12), his city incorporated into the territory of the tribe of Ephraim (16:3), and then given to the Levites as one of the Levitical cities (21:21). Yet the Joshua traditions also remember that the city of Gezer was never controlled by the Israelites under Joshua (16:10):

They did not, however, drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer: so the Canaanites have lived within Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labour.

This is confirmed in the Book of Judges (1:28-29):

When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not in fact drive them out. And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; but the Canaanites lived among them in Gezer.

The introductory comment "when Israel grew strong" suggests that some time passed before Israel could gain any degree of control of Gezer. Here we might ask the logical question how it was that the Israelites could force the inhabitants of Gezer to do forced labor for them, effectually making them slaves, yet could not force them out of the city. A comment a few verses later in Judges may provide us some clue (2:2):

For your part, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. See what you have done!

This suggests that contrary to the assertions in Joshua about killing all the Canaanite inhabitants of the land (e.g., 6:21), the Israelites actually incorporated at least some Canaanites into Israelite society. This is one of the first solid clues that Israel's entry into the land may have been much more complex than the Joshua account appears to present on the surface.

Later traditions confirm that Gezer was not under Israelite control until the time of Solomon when it was given to him by Pharaoh after he had captured the city from the Canaanites (1 Kings 9:16-71a):

Pharaoh King of Egypt had gone up and captured Gezer and burnt it with fire, and had slain the Canaanites who dwelt in the city, and had given it as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife; so Solomon rebuilt Gezer. . .

There are also other tensions within the book of Joshua between the accounts as they first appear on the surface, and another memory that surfaces on closer inspection. For example, there is tension between the idea of total conquest by

all Israel and the memory of limited local conquests by individual tribes or local military leaders (cf. 18:2-3). While the idea of "all Israel" is a prominent theme throughout Joshua, there are still echoes of individual tribes struggling to overcome local opposition. For example, the fall of the stronghold of Debir is credited in one place to "all Israel" under Joshua (10:38-39):

Then Joshua, with all Israel, turned back to Debir and assaulted it, and he took it with its king and all its towns; they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining; just as he had done to Hebron, and, as he had done to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and its king.

Yet, there is also the memory that Debir was taken by Caleb and his family who had emerged as tribal leaders of Judah, and specifically by his brother Othniel. Both are identified as "descendants of Kenaz," or Kennizites (Josh 15:6, 15:7). While Caleb was always identified with the tribe of Judah, the Kennizites were remembered as Canaanites (cf. Gen 15:19, Num 32:12). We know that other Canaanite peoples had joined the Israelites, for example, the Kenites, the people of Moses' wife (Jud 1:16). So it is entirely possible that Caleb's family had Canaanite ancestry. In any case, the Joshua traditions remember that the city of Debir was taken by Caleb's brother Othniel, who would later become one of Israel's judges (15:15-17; cf. Jud 1:11-16; 3:9-10).

And [Caleb] went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher. And Caleb said, "Whoever smites Kiriath-sepher, and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife." And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it. . .

There is even a tradition that recounts Joshua himself pleading with the individual tribes to take the territory that had been assigned to them. Accounts in the first half of the book described complete and total control of the land under Joshua and "all Israel," with the land then divided between the tribes while the "land had rest from war." Yet accounts later in the book seem to describe a situation quite different in which the allotments were made to each tribe who were then responsible themselves for taking the territory assigned to them (18:1-3):

Then the whole congregation of the Israelites assembled at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them. There remained among the Israelites seven tribes whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned. So Joshua said to the Israelites, "How long will you be

slack about going in and taking possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you?"

Here the tension is obvious even within a few verses, as the perspective of the land having already been subdued (v. 1) is immediately followed by the assumption that seven tribes had not yet taken their assigned territory (vv. 3-4). The early chapters of Judges support this perspective that individual tribes were still fighting to take their territory (Jud 1:3, 17).

There are still other indications within the book of Joshua of a memory that the conquest was not as all encompassing as some other passages in the book might indicate.

Josh 13:13 Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites; but Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day.

Josh 17:12 Yet the descendants of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities [Bethshean, Ibleam, Dor, En-dor, Taanach, Megiddo]; but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. . .

Even at Joshua's impending death, the traditions acknowledge that there was a great deal of the land that had not yet come under Israelite control (13:2-6a):

This is the land that still remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of the Geshurites (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is reckoned as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim, in the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites, and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the east, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath, all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians.

Beyond the repeated emphasis on "all Israel" in certain places in Joshua, there is little evidence that Israel was an "all" united army. In fact, internal evidence in Joshua, and as we shall see even more strongly in Judges, seems to show a group of very loosely allied yet fiercely independent tribes that were as quick to fight each other as they were outsiders rather than being a unified people. These factious tribes seemed to have fought localized battles and united only in limited ways for limited objectives.

There is also a memory within the Joshua traditions that in spite of the claims of total conquest in places, some of the tribes were actually displaced from their original allotments because they could not conquer the cities given to them. For example, the tribe of Dan was originally assigned territory in the southwestern foothills at the northern edge of the Philistine territory (19:40-46):

The seventh lot came out for the tribe of Dan, according to its families. And the territory of its inheritance included Zorah, Eshta-ol, Ir-shemesh, Sha-alabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, Elon, Timnah, Ekron, Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-rimmon, and Me-jarkon and Rakkon with the territory over against Joppa.

Ekron, along with Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Gaza, was the northernmost of the five main cities that formed the Philistine Pentapolis, the heart of Philistine power (13:3). The Philistines were far stronger than the Israelites at the time. They had superior arms that included a formidable chariotry as well as iron weapons (cf. Judg 1:19). The Israelites would not learn how to work iron for nearly two centuries (cf. 1 Sam 13:19-21), and what weapons they had were made of relatively soft bronze. In spite of reports in Joshua of Philistine cities being taken, the Philistines were not subdued until the time of David, and even then remained in the land.

The Danites simply could not take the Philistine strongholds, and were likely harassed by the Philistines who were not too happy about newcomers trying to occupy their territory. Driven from their assigned land the tribe of Dan moved to the far north and settled there, which gave rise to the saying "from Dan to Beersheba" (Judges 20:1), meaning the whole country from north to south. The Joshua traditions refer matter-of-factly to this reassignment of territory (Josh 19:47-48; cf. Jud 18):

When the territory of the Danites was lost to them, the Danites went up and fought against Leshem, and after capturing it and putting it to the sword they took possession of it and settled in it, calling Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their ancestor. This is the inheritance of the tribe of Dan, according to their families -- these cities with their villages.

In a similar manner, the western half of the tribe of Manasseh was assigned the territory that lay along the eastern Megiddo Plain to the Jordan Valley, the site of one of the strongest Philistine fortresses in the area at Beth-shean (or Beth-shan). They complained to Joshua about their allotment under the guise that they had not been given enough land, when it seems apparent that they simply could not take the Philistine garrisons in the area (17:12, 16):

Yet the Manassites could not take possession of those towns; but the Canaanites continued to live in that land. . . . The tribe of Joseph said, "The hill country is not enough for us; yet all the Canaanites who live in the plain have chariots of iron, both those in Beth-shean and its villages and those in the Valley of Jezreel."

Joshua was not sympathetic to their plight and told them that they would have to defeat the Philistines in order to have their land (17:17-18). Yet, later traditions tell us that even in the time of Saul some 200 years later, Beth-Shean was still a Philistine fortress on whose walls the mutilated body of Saul and his sons were hung as Philistine war trophies (1 Sam 31:12).

There are even hints that some of the tribes were forced to merge with other tribes, or perhaps were decimated in this period by the Philistines. For example, there is some evidence that the tribe of Simeon was absorbed into the tribe of Judah (Josh 19:9; cf. Judg 1:17).

The inheritance of the tribe of Simeon formed part of the territory of Judah; because the portion of the tribe of Judah was too large for them, the tribe of Simeon obtained an inheritance within their inheritance.

Simeon's territory recorded in Joshua lies at the western and southern edges of Judah, the territory closest to the Philistine strongholds along the southwestern coast. The tribe of Simeon, even though portrayed as part of Judah, plays little role in Israel's history and is not mentioned again after the 6th century BC.

Likewise, the tribe of Gad shared its territory with the tribe of Rueben on the eastern side of the Jordan (Deut 3:12). Also, the tribes that were assigned territory occupied by other Canaanite strongholds along the Megiddo Plains (Issachar and Western Manasseh) and along the Phoenician Coast (Asher) virtually disappear from Israel's history during the period of the Judges.

There are several other historical difficulties that arise from the book of Joshua, both from external evidence and from within the book itself. For example, even though there are destruction levels in some of the Canaanite cities mentioned in Joshua, as noted above, there is no evidence to link Israel to the destruction levels, either in time frame or physical artifacts. That the cities were suddenly destroyed is obvious from the excavations. Warfare was common in the ancient world, and even from other biblical records, we know that there was constant warfare among the many city-states into which Canaan was divided. But there are problems in establishing a certain chronology of Israel's entry into the land, related to various views on the date of the Exodus (see **Date of the Exodus**).

Various estimates range from 1440 to 1290 BC. Without a clear time frame, there is little way definitely to link Israel to the destruction of these cities.

All this simply suggests that what appears on the surface of the book of Joshua is not the whole story. What appears to be a "clean" and simple entry into the land with the straightforward conquest and subjugation of the Canaanites by a unified people under the leadership of Joshua, may have been a much more protracted affair and had an exceedingly more complex history. It also suggests that even traditions within the book of Joshua, a "minority voice" in the book, were familiar with that more complicated history.

This raises questions that go deeper than the historical questions about the nature of the Israelite entry into the land. If the book itself preserves the memory of that other more difficult and more complicated version of Israel's occupation of Canaan, why does the present reading of the book so simplify the story? Was the book deliberately constructed to focus on one aspect of the story, while unhesitatingly providing the details of a different version of that history? If one aspect was emphasized, what was the purpose of doing so? And what was the purpose of providing details that would bring the historical aspects of that version into question?

Here, we have obviously raised questions that cannot be answered by investigating just the historical problems of the book. There are far more questions, first of literary composition, and then questions of intent and purpose, which in this context are finally theological questions. And here it is obvious that the very historical questions that arise from a closer reading of the book and need to be addressed by historical research, also reveal a whole set of theological questions that invite us to delve deeper into the traditions to understand them.

B. The View from the Book of Judges

As we move from Joshua into the book of Judges, the tone and mood of the writing changes considerably. While the main themes of Joshua are emphasized by the promise "I will be with you" (1:5; cf. 23:10) and the refrain "the land had rest from war," (11:23), Judges presents a much more somber perspective. From the beginning of the book, the people are fragmented and beleaguered by powerful Canaanites who are pressing them from all sides. The confidence that permeates the book of Joshua has disappeared, replaced by a sense of desperation in the face of enormous obstacles. The thematic comments of Judges are the opening question, "Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites?" (1:1),

and the concluding commentary, "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25).

Scattered tribes who were desperately trying to gain a stable foothold in the land have replaced the idea of "all Israel." While the Israelites were entrenched in the land, they were constantly pressed on every side by surrounding peoples. Even though the Book of Joshua had reported the death of Joshua in a period when the "land had rest from war," the Book of Judges clearly places Joshua still in leadership during this chaotic scramble for survival amid ongoing defeats and failures to take key cities (Jud 2:6). After the death of Joshua in the Book of Judges the leadership of Israel passed into the hands of local military leaders who arose to address specific crises. Most of these leaders were inept and terribly flawed. Even the well-known figures of Gideon and Samson are more like anti-heroes. Gideon was a cowardly Ba'al worshipper who led his entire family into Ba'al worship (8:27). Sampson, in spite of his Nazarite vows and God-given strength, was more concerned with Philistine women than he was with the welfare of Israel, a vice that cost him his life. The best leader in this entire period was a woman, Deborah, who proved to be a capable civil as well as a military leader (4:5).

In general, the book portrays an increasingly deteriorating situation. The people continually abandoned the worship of God and adopted the fertility religion of the Canaanites. The leaders were unable to bring any unity to the people and could not provide any spiritual leadership.

Besides the obvious differences in the perspective of the two books, there are also differences in historical details between the books. The perspective of failure and hardship that had been only an underlying strand of Joshua emerges in Judges as the main topic. This is evidenced in several specific examples that serve to highlight the differences.

We have already noted that one of the main themes of the Book of Joshua is the idea of "all Israel" fighting a unified campaign against the Canaanites (3:7, 17, 4:14, 7:23, 8:21, 24, 23:2). Yet the minority voice of Joshua also preserves the memory of individual campaigns by individual tribes, such as Judah's campaign against Debir (15:13) and Western Manasseh and Ephraim struggling against the Philistines in the Megiddo Plain (17:16). In the Book of Judges, there is never a unified Israel. From the beginning of the book isolated tribes are fighting for their very survival against superior forces in isolated campaigns. In Judges, this idea of independent tribes fighting for their own territory is even connected with the leadership of Joshua:

2:6 When Joshua dismissed the people, the Israelites all went to their own inheritances to take possession of the land.

Judah and Simeon made an alliance to defeat Adoni-Bezek of the Perizzites (1:1-7). Judah campaigned against Canaanites in Hebron and the southern desert, sometimes with the aid of Simeon (1:8-21) and were more successful than most of the tribes in securing their territory. Western Manasseh and Ephraim continued, largely unsuccessfully, to fight the Philistines along the Megiddo Plain (1:22-29). Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali all tried unsuccessfully to drive the Canaanites from their territory, but settled for moving in among them (1:30-33). The Amorites, a general term for Canaanites, forced the tribe of Dan to remain in the hill country (1:34-36).

Rather than sweeping claims of conquest, Judges interprets the failure of the people to take the land as a test from God, either to see if they would remain faithful to God (2:22-23), or to teach the young people who had not yet learned war how to fight (3:1-2). The book also sees the Israelites' struggles to secure the land as a judgment for failing to remain faithful to God and allowing the worship of Baal to flourish (2:11-15, 20).

As the book unfolds in recounting the exploits of the *shophtim* it becomes more apparent that they are local leaders rather than "all Israel" leaders. Othneil led Judah in campaigns against Arameans from the northeast (3:7-11). Ehud led the Benjamites against the Moabites who were raiding across the Jordan from the east (3:12-30). Deborah led the Ephraimites against the Canaanite city-state of Hazor (4-5), while Gideon led a small band from Manasseh against a Midianite and Amalekite coalition (6-8). Jephthah raised an army from among Manasseh and Gilead to fight the Ammonites who were trying to expand their territory across the Jordan (11), and precipitated a brief civil war because he did not invite the Ephraimites to participate (12:1-6). Finally, Samson became the hero of the tribe of Dan because of his harassment of the Philistines (13-16).

To further emphasize the scattered nature of the tribes and the apparent total lack of unity, the Book of Judges concludes with accounts of a destructive civil war. The tribe of Benjamin was nearly annihilated because they chose to fight rather than recognize the authority of the other tribes over them.

All of this serves to highlight the fact that Judges agrees with the minority voice in Joshua that the Israelite settlement in the land was much more complicated than the smooth operation that the first chapters of Joshua portrays. This again raises serious historical questions about Israel's entry into the land and the nature

of the conquest. But it also raises questions about the nature of the material in Joshua and Judges, and how we should hear that material as Scripture.

C. Summary of the Issues

Joshua presents the entry into the land as a rapid conquest in which the Israelites eliminated all opposition and possessed all of the land as they obeyed God and followed his leadership. They were led by a single leader appointed by God and achieved success because God fought for them and was with them. The impression given is that Israel was a tightly unified people working together as one, unified in their worship of God and in their goal of settling the land and eliminating the Canaanites from the land.

Yet within Joshua there is a minority voice, another memory that acknowledges the entry into the land was anything but smooth, and that Israel was not a unified people. It consistently acknowledges that there was a great deal of land left unconquered, and that the process of entry into the land could be seen more in terms of settlement rather than conquest.

Judges presents the Israelites as a minority, precariously holding onto small enclaves of land within a much larger and stronger Canaanite majority. Following the minority voice of Joshua, it acknowledges that many of the territories or cities reported as subdued under Joshua by all Israel were not taken until much later or by actions of individuals or alliances of tribes. The impression is given that Israel was a very loosely confederated collection of individual tribes who sometimes came together for a common cause. They were plagued by disunity both socially and religiously, lacked any stable leadership, and often fought among themselves.

This raises the primary historical questions of the two books. Was Israel's entry into the land by conquest or by settlement? Did Israel enter the land suddenly as a strongly unified conquering people? Or did they migrate into the area over a period of time gradually spreading over the land as they were able to gain enough strength to challenge the Canaanite city-states? Or was it some combination of conquest and settlement, in which they fought some initial battles on the fringes of Canaanite territory to establish a foothold in the land, and then gradually infiltrated into Canaanite territory over a period of centuries? Or was there even a more complicated history in which they allied themselves with some Canaanite city-states and fought others, at the same time that they joined up with remnants of ancestral tribes who had remained in the central highlands around Shechem since the time of Abraham? Or was the whole entry into the land nothing more than a peaceful migration of people who were forced

into fighting battles as the people of the land resisted being crowded by newcomers, and the conquest stories are only tribal legend?

And these questions then lead to literary questions about the relationship between the Books of Joshua and Judges. The traditional view has been that the books are sequential, with Joshua telling the story of the initial successful settlement in the land under the leadership of Joshua, while Judges tells of a later time after the death of Joshua when God was punishing the people for disobedience. Yet, is it possible, in light of the minority voice in Joshua, that the books are not as sequential as traditionally thought? Is it possible that the differences in the books may not even be as much historical as they are theological? That is, much like the different versions of the Gospels, do the two books simply present a different emphasis of essentially the same period in Israel's history? To this question we will return.

D. Historical Perspectives on the Entry into the Land

Of course, historians and biblical scholars have offered various theories to address these questions. For various reasons, as noted at the beginning of this study, the historical questions have tended to dominate study of this material. As a result, many of the theories are to answer the historical questions raised by the books, since this has tended to be the area of most concern even to those who want to use the Bible as Scripture. While there are many variations and refinements of the historical approach, most of them can be summarized under four major categories.

1. Literal Conquest

This view favours the majority voice of Joshua as being the historical core of the traditions. It also assumes the biblical books are primarily a historical record of Israel's entry into the land preserved within the community simply because they were historical records. A well-known proponent of this perspective is Yezekiel Kaufmann.

This perspective basically accepts the traditional way of viewing the books. It assumes that the accounts are basically historically reliable as they stand in the Bible with the character of Joshua as the focal point. He led the Israelites in a near total conquest of the land in a series of lightning strikes against the Canaanites, successful because God led them into the battles and fought for them. Judges portrays a much later time when the Israelites had abandoned the worship of God, and therefore were suffering under God's condemnation. All of the failures of the people can be traced to their disobedience. The entire account

is of military battles being fought; there was no peaceful occupation of the land at any time.

What appear to be discrepancies in the accounts could be explained if we had more information. Lacking that, we simply have to accept the majority voice of Joshua as the most reliable and suspend judgment on anything that does not fit with the idea of a literal and absolute conquest of the land as portrayed in Joshua 1-11 unless or until we have more information.

2. Conquest Modified by Tradition

This perspective tries to balance Joshua and Judges as historical sources, but actually favors the evidence of archaeological data and historical reconstruction built from them as more reliable sources of historical evidence than the biblical texts. William F. Albright, G. E. Wright, and John Bright are well-known proponents of this perspective, although they would differ in details.

This view sees the traditions of a conquest of the land as a valid historical memory of Israel, but one that has been greatly modified by tradition and the retelling of the story within the community over the centuries. While the basic details of the biblical traditions need to be taken seriously as preserving that historical memory, they cannot be taken literally or at face value without some corroborating evidence that would lend support to them. Where archaeology cannot directly support the biblical traditions, they should not be taken as reliable history, although they may still preserve valid historical memory. We simply have no way to know in cases where there is no supporting evidence. Some scholars at this point would feel much more free to speculate about the actual history, while others would insist that we should follow the biblical text in the absence of contrary evidence.

So this view tends to lean heavily on archaeology to support the basic history, assuming that the biblical story line has been heavily schematized and simplified in the biblical accounts. This view would see Joshua as a leader in early Israel, but one that became a hero figure in later generations. As a result, the traditions expanded his role and attributed some of the actions of later figures, for example some of the conquests of David, to him to validate his position as God's leader of the people.

3. Peaceful Settlement

This view leans toward Judges, as well as the minority voice of Joshua, as a more reliable source of early Israel's history. The majority voice of Joshua is rejected as being too idealized and too heavily influenced by theological and

tribal agenda to be of much value. The methods employed are far more historical, trying to reconstruct history from ancient documents, artifacts, and preserved traditions in order to build a historical stage on which to set the biblical material. As a result, there is heavy dependence on comparative religion, as well as logical interpretation and reconstruction of history, a technique common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth are the most well known advocates of this approach.

Israel's movement into the land is seen as a relatively peaceful migration of tribes who gradually settled among the city-states of Palestine. After an extended period of consolidation in the 11th and 10th centuries, the settlement climaxed in a period of expansion under the leadership of David in the 9th and early 8th centuries. The Israelites who first entered the land joined remnants of family units who had not joined the migration to Egypt with Jacob and had remained through the centuries in the central highlands around Shechem. They fought isolated battles as they expanded their territory and encroached into Canaanite controlled areas. But there were no "all Israel" wars, which was a romanticized nationalistic ideal projected back into this period from a much later time, reflected in the book of Joshua. Joshua himself was only a local Ephraimite leader who gradually became associated with the "all Israel" ideal. There was no "people" until the tribal confederation portrayed in Joshua 24. This covenant ceremony became the focal point for the rise of the unified people that would become the nation of Israel.

4. Peasant Revolt

This perspective rejects both Joshua and Judges as reliable historical accounts, and rather depends on modern social theory to address the historical issues. The methods employed are a specific type of social theory that sees progression and development in society as the result of class struggle between the "haves" and the "have nots." This view sees the biblical traditions as largely folklore that arose out of the social progression of a group trying to justify its own national identity. Proponents of this perspective are George Medenhall and Norman Gottwald.

In this view, the idea of "tribe" should be understood as a social unit, not a family unit. The relationships that appear as family relationships in the traditions are actually ways to describe social relationships and interactions. The conflict present in the accounts between Israelites and Canaanites should be understood as an internal class struggle between peasant villagers (Israelites) and wealthy city dwellers (Canaanites), a struggle between the "haves" and the "have nots." This struggle was precipitated in Canaan by the influx of a small core group of

escaped slaves, the original Israelites, who rallied the people to rise up in rebellion against the oppression of the dominant class. The association of all the later Israelites with the early events of the exodus, Sinai, and entry into the land is a projection back into history of the story of the group that emerged as a dominant "tribe" in the area. They simply adopted the story of the small group of escaped slaves that first entered the land and made it a national heritage.

III. Literary Perspectives on Joshua and Judges

These different perspectives on the historical issues of the books each attempt to construct a plausible historical scenario of the material in Joshua and Judges. As can be seen from this brief survey, there are arguments on all sides of the issue, some depending more on the biblical texts in various ways while others depend more on evidence external to the text, reconstruction, and speculation. But the diversity of the opinions, none of which provides adequate explanation to all aspects of the biblical text, suggests that in asking historical questions we may be asking questions that the text itself cannot answer, or perhaps was never intended to answer. This has led biblical scholars to turn to other methods for addressing the apparent historical discrepancies in the books.

These perspectives use a literary approach in examining the text, asking questions of how the tradition developed, how the books were composed, what the relationship might be between the books (and to other biblical traditions) in terms of story line, what is actually intended to be communicated, history and methods of composition, and possible sources. Of course, some of these methods are just as speculative as historical reconstruction. But many have found that examining the texts in terms of literary dynamic and intent has produced a better understanding of the texts than trying to answer the historical questions.

As we might expect, there are a variety of perspectives in a literary approach. However, all begin with a basic assumption: the biblical texts, however soundly they are rooted in history, are finally literary works and should be examined in terms of literary questions and methods. That simply means that the study of the biblical material may use historical aspects of the text if possible, but that the primary focus is the text themselves and the story they communicate.

We should note that, in similar ways to historical investigation, some of the literary methods do not have a direct or theological intent. That is, the immediate goal of literary analysis is not to reach theological statements, but to understand the books as literature produced by a certain community in history. That may well yield theological results, since the community is a faith

community and these are religious texts. But the immediate goal of these approaches is to learn more about the text as a literary work.

Here also we should distinguish different uses of the term "literary", since it is used in three major ways. First, in its broad meaning, "literary" simply means a focus on the text, as opposed to the history of which the text tells or in which it was produced. In this sense, literary methods include any technique of investigation that is primarily concerned with a document or piece of writing as literature.

Second, a much more technical meaning of the term emerged in the 19th century in which literary analysis was directly connected to historical research. It referred to the study of various strands of tradition or sources, whether oral or written, that were used to compose a document. The study of these sources was a prolegomena, as Julius Wellhausen put it, to historical investigation, trying to establish reliable sources for the study of history. The first two perspectives surveyed below are generally of this type.

Third, today literary criticism is still a technical term but used much more broadly to refer to the study of the inner workings of a document, things like plot development, rhetorical dynamic, features such as irony and satire, word play, structure, the use of certain patterns or forms, all the features that go into making a piece of literature. The last two perspectives below work from this broader definition.

This "new literary criticism" is far less connected with historical issues, although most do not neglect it completely. However, in some of the more radical developments in literary criticism, such as structuralism, there is no need to place a piece of literature into a historical context. It is assumed that the "meaning" of literature by its very nature is self-contained within the piece of literature.

A. Source Analysis in Joshua and Judges

We cannot take time here to trace the development of source analysis, although a couple of observations are necessary. As mentioned above, source analysis arose as an adjunct to historical investigation in trying to establish the reliability of documents as historical resources. In its early phases, literary analysis was concerned with establishing the oldest strand that went into the composition of a literary work. Historians assumed that the earliest strand would be the most historically reliable. However, as the emphasis began to shift more to the text itself rather than to the history it could illuminate, the concern shifted to sources

as clues to the compositional technique of the literature, and therefore as clues to the nature of the work itself.

Much of the early source work focused on the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament (see **JEDP: Sources in the Pentateuch**). The general conclusion was that the Pentateuch was a composite work that grew out of the life of the community of Faith over several centuries rather than beings composed at one time by Moses himself. Later study allowed a larger role for the older Mosaic traditions, but did not change the perspective that the book in its final form was the product of a long development with a variety of strands of tradition. Much like the different views of the four Gospels, the Pentateuch was formed from different strands of traditions that circulated in Israel representing different perspectives on Israel's history (see **The Synoptic Problem**).

1. Pentateuch or Hexateuch?

As scholars applied the methods of source analysis and viewed the Pentateuch in terms of various strands of tradition or sources, the question arose about the extent of those sources. That is, could sources be seen in other places in the Old Testament beyond the Pentateuch?

This issue revolved around the relationship of the Book of Deuteronomy to the writings both before and after it. While Deuteronomy had been traditionally included as the last book of the Pentateuch, it is also obvious that it relates very closely to the book of Joshua that follows it since the story line of entry into the land from the Pentateuch continues in Joshua. And, as we have seen, Joshua has close connections with Judges, while Judges in turn sets the stage for the rise of the monarchy recounted in Samuel and Kings.

This relationship of the books of Joshua through Kings had long been recognized in Jewish tradition where they are known together as The Former Prophets (the Latter Prophets are the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve so-called Minor Prophets). The new question was how to understand the literary relationship of Deuteronomy as part of the Pentateuch to the material in the Former prophets, and especially in Joshua.

The first approach to this issue simply extended the results of study of the Pentateuch to the Former Prophets. Scholars had identified several specific strands of tradition in the Pentateuch and so they concluded that the connection of Deuteronomy with Joshua and the books that followed could be explained by tracing the same strands of tradition into the Former Prophets, at least through

the early chapters of Joshua. In this view, even though Deuteronomy was recognized to be a separate strand of tradition from much of the rest of the Pentateuch (labelled the D tradition or source), it was seen as part of an unfolding story that continued through Joshua. Joshua was the fulfillment of the promises of possessing the land made throughout the Pentateuch and especially in Deuteronomy.

While Joshua shared the same perspective as the narratives in the Pentateuch, Judges was seen as a different kind of writing, taking the story in a different direction both in terms of literary structure and in terms of content and theological themes. As a result, the strands of tradition together were grouped as Gen-Exod-Lev-Num-Deut-Josh, with Jud-Sam-Kings forming a later set of traditions that told Israel's history in a different way (this follows the Hebrew canon in which Ruth and Chronicles are not seen as part of this history; see **Canons of the Hebrew Bible**). In effect, this lengthened the Pentateuch ("five books") to a Hexateuch ("six books"). The term Hexateuch was simply a way to refer to the idea that Joshua should be seen with the books of the Pentateuch and separate from Judges through Kings.

2. Pentateuch or Tetrateuch?

While the idea of a Hexateuch could explain the relationship of Deuteronomy with Joshua, problems with this proposal quickly emerged. The sources that could be seen rather easily in the Pentateuch, and upon which the while idea rested, could not be easily traced in Joshua if at all. Also, while the relationship of Deuteronomy and Joshua was clear, how that relationship should be seen in terms of the other four books of the Pentateuch remained uncertain since Joshua had little connection with those four books. Likewise, there was no adequate explanation, if all six books were to be seen as comprising a common set of traditions, why Deuteronomy should have influenced Joshua so heavily, but not have influenced the books preceding it more. Also, the idea of a Hexateuch separated Joshua from the rest of the Former Prophets, something unlikely considering the close connections between the minority voice in Joshua and Judges that we have already seen.

The whole issue of the literary relationship of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets went a different direction with the work of Martin Noth. While his ideas are detailed and have been extended and revised by others, his basic proposal was that the book of Deuteronomy along with the Former Prophets should be seen as an independent work reaching its final form during the Israelite exile to Babylon.

The entire work, Deuteronomy along with Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, incorporated many older traditions and perhaps even earlier versions of Deuteronomy itself. In its final exilic development it interpreted Israel's history from that later perspective (c. 580-550 BC). Deuteronomy was the introduction to this entire historical work that was called the Deuteronomic History. This accounted for the close connection of Deuteronomy with Joshua and the books that followed. As a result, the strands of traditions together were grouped as Gen-Exod-Lev-Num, while the Deuteronomic History included Deut-Josh-Jud-Sam-Kings as a unified literary work. This in effect reduced the Pentateuch to a Tetrateuch ("four books").

Historically, the implications of this perspective is much more far-reaching than the Hexateuch proposal. While the Hexateuch was not used to argue a literal historical record for the material of either Joshua or Judges, it did allow a more traditional approach to the historical issues. Generally, the traditions of both the Hexateuch and the remaining Former Prophets were thought to be very old traditions. With Joshua connected with Deuteronomy, the sequential unfolding of settlement in the land, with later apostasy in the period of the Judges, was more likely.

However, with the Tetrateuch approach, the entire account of settlement in the land was seen as a very late development in Israel's history, at least in the form it appears in the books now. While various scholars took the historical questions more seriously than others in working with this approach, to many this suggested that these later traditions were not as reliable as historical records since they were actually written 500-700 years after the events in a radically different historical context. Later studies were more ready to allow greater validity to oral tradition in the ancient world, as well as allowing very old strands of tradition to be incorporated into the final work. Still, the effect of this approach was to push the historical issues into the background in favor of seeing the Deuteronomic History as more of a social or theological interpretation of history rather than simply the recording of historical data.

B. Holistic literary approaches to Joshua and Judges

Noth's proposal has been widely accepted since it allows us to explain many of the features of the biblical text for which historical or source approaches could not. Some have not accepted his perspective for fear of what it might do to certain theories about the nature and authority of Scripture. Yet, in many ways it provides a perspective from which to take the biblical traditions seriously apart from the magnitude of historical problems that emerge in Joshua and Judges.

Still, many have challenged his proposal on other grounds than just certain view of Scripture.

1. Canonical perspectives

From slightly different perspectives both Brevard Childs and James Sanders raised questions that went beyond dealing with traditions and sources from which the books were composed. The new questions they raised sought to understand how the books related to each other in terms of functioning together as part of the canon of Scripture for a community or communities of Faith.

The fact remains that in spite of all the previous proposals, the actual canon of Scripture has been a Pentateuch followed by the account of Israel's settlement in the land. Both Jewish and Christian communities, even with the slightly different order of the Christian canon in the Former Prophets, have always understood the books in some kind of unfolding order, from Pentateuch to Historical Books/Formers Prophets. This concern with canon takes that order seriously, yet without returning to a position that allows the historical questions to override the biblical text itself. It was not the biblical text that forced the various divisions, but the assumptions in asking historical questions and using historical methods that led to trying to sort the material out along historical lines. This does not suggest that the historical methods did not produce helpful results, only that finally they do not deal adequately with the biblical text as Scripture for the Church.

The perspective of a canonical whole asserts that how the community of Faith arranged the biblical material, whether by redactors or authors, whether from oral tradition or documents, whether ancient or newer traditions, is the governing factor in how we should see the material. The primary question is not, "what were the sources from which this document was composed?" or even "what strands of tradition can we identify in this work." The primary question, at least for those who are part of a community of Faith, is simply, "how shall we understand this material as it has been passed on to us." This perspective emphasizes the communication of the material as it stands in its present form rather than imposing other categories on the text that force us to read it in different ways.

This has significant implications for how we see the relationship between Joshua and Judges, as well as the relationship of those books to the larger canon. From this view, Deuteronomy, with its summary of the exodus, focus on the giving of torah at Sinai, as well as the covenant curses and blessing with which the book concludes, is clearly the conclusion of the Pentateuch. The central section of the

book includes a reiteration of many of the Mosaic instructions, and so must be seen in relation to the torah traditions of Exodus through Numbers. Yet, it awaits the crossing of the Jordan and entry into the land to fulfill what the exodus and the promises to Abraham had begun, and so ends in expectation of the future.

Joshua assumes this emphasis on the instructions from God to his people about how to live in their world (the *torah*; while we often think of "law," the Hebrew term *torah* actually means "instruction;" see *Torah as Holiness*). In fact, faithfulness to those instructions becomes the primary focus as the people enter the land, both from the ending of Deuteronomy and the beginning of Joshua. Likewise Judges uses faithfulness to God's instructions as the criteria for evaluating the spiritual status of the people throughout the book. Failure to follow those instructions is one reason given in Judges for the hardship that the people endured at the hands of the Canaanites.

Rather than dependence on just the Book of Deuteronomy for this emphasis on faithfulness, Joshua and the books following depend on the entire preceding tradition from creation to the exodus contained in the Pentateuch. Specifically, the twin themes of God's grace (exodus) and faithful response (Sinai) that have unfolded throughout most of the Pentateuch in the exodus and Sinai narratives, provide the groundwork upon which the entry to the land is built. The Former Prophets track the outworking of the implications of the exodus and the giving of the *torah* at Sinai through Israel's subsequent history.

So, there is an integral relationship between Joshua and the Pentateuch. It is not on the level of sources or traditions, but in terms of what was important to the community who shaped these traditions, how Israel lived out in the land the implications of the covenant they had made with God at Sinai following the Exodus. This suggests that the unity of the material is a thematic or theological unity, and not a unity (or disunity) of sources. It also suggests that the sequence and organization of the material is not chronological and not dependent on sources, but is theological and dependent on the testimony of the community to their own history.

This also suggests that the material of the Former Prophets, while closely connected thematically with the Pentateuch, is a significantly different kind of material. There is a clear break between the formative era of the exodus and the wilderness wandering and the later entry into the land. While Joshua succeeded Moses as leader, the roles of the two men were radically different. It was left to Joshua to put into practice in the land the principles that God had revealed to Moses in the desert. The movement into the land in the first chapters of Joshua was far more than a geographical move; it was a significant shift in the way

Israel related to God. The "land" becomes its own theological symbol as the traditions unfold, the place where faithfulness to God will be tested, the place where life must actually be lived as God's people.

2. The convergence of history, literature, and theology

The canonical approach to reading Joshua and Judges as part of a larger literary work in conjunction with the Pentateuch has been modified in various ways as further suggestions have been made. Yet, it has remained the primary way to understand the material beyond a purely historical reading.

Noth's proposal of a Deuteronomistic History reaching its final form in the time following the exile of Israel to Babylon, with the Book of Deuteronomy as its anchor, has remained widely accepted although modified. Rather than seeing the book in terms of sources or compositional strategies, now the emphasis is on the Deuteronomistic History as the post-exilic communities' theological interpretation of their entire history from the perspective of exile. Most would acknowledge an earlier form of Deuteronomy that is much older than the present book, but reworked and edited in light of the events of the exile. Likewise, the traditions in Joshua and Judges are understood as very old traditions, but occur in their present form as the result of being cast into a new interpretive framework in light of the exile.

It is really this interpretative framework that is emphasized in talking about a Deuteronomistic History or the Deuteronomist who composed it. The interpretative framework is both historical and theological. Historically, the traditions are read in light of the outworking of Israel's history into the post-exilic era, a time when Israel had been driven from the land and enslaved by foreign powers. Theologically, the Torah and covenant traditions become the criteria for reading Israel's subsequent history in the exile. These come together since Israel's history in the exilic came to a disappointing end, a failure that the community attributed to Israel's unfaithfulness in keeping the commitment to God that the people took to themselves at Sinai. The interpretative framework then is a theological perspective of Israel's history read in terms of faithfulness to God.

IV. History as Theology

In light of all this, we can return to some of the historical questions raised at the beginning. There are still no answers to those specific historical problems. But perhaps it is more obvious now that some of those historical problems are important to us because we have not heard the biblical text as the faith

community of Israel intended it to be heard. That is, we have asked historical questions when the books are not history. This does not suggest that they are fictional; that reaction is as much a part of our own biases in favor of our modern categories as were the assumptions that allowed the historical problems to dominate the books in the first place. But it does say that there is a theological dimension to the books that simply does not concern itself with historical harmony, and will not yield to historical questions. In fact, the very dissenting voices in Joshua and Judges that raise the historical questions may provide us the best clue to how we can hear the books theologically.

While there are historical elements within both accounts of Joshua and Judges, the primary purpose of neither account is purely or even primarily historical, so asking historical questions is not really helpful in understanding the books. The primary purpose of the books as they are preserved by the Community of Faith as Scripture is confessional and theological. They review and tell Israel's history from the time of entry into the land until the rise of the monarchy in terms of obedience and faithfulness to God. They tell of Israel's blessings when the people were faithful and of awful consequences when they were not. They bear witness to the work of God in the world, both His self-revelation in history and the community's response to that revelation, both positively and negatively. So rather than asking "what really happened?" a historical question, we should ask "what is the community telling us about God?" a confessional and theological question.

Rather than seeing the two books in opposition to each other, or trying to ignore or rationalize the obvious discrepancies in the books, a better means of access to the theological message is to ask how the books relate to each other theologically, and in the larger context of Scripture. For this, it might be helpful to work with a graphic. This admittedly schematizes the accounts, but does so to highlight the larger literary structure of both Pentateuch and Former Prophets to illustrate the confessional themes that govern both blocks of material.

First, note the perspective from which Israel viewed its history. If Noth is at all correct that the entire Deuteronomistic History presents Israel looking back on its history from after the exile, then the perspective of the entire work is from a time after the last event in 2 Kings, the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Israel and its king to Babylon. That event becomes the interpretive lens through which all of the material is to be read, much as the Gospel accounts in the New Testament are to be read through the lens of the final events recorded there, the resurrection of Jesus.

Since that event is the loss of the land and, at least for the time being, the ending of God's people, the history is told in terms of that ending and that failure. The dominating question, then, in looking at Israel's history was, "how did this happen?" How could a people who had such a heritage of promise and experience of the grace of God come to such a dismal failure? This becomes the interpretive framework in which the rest of the history is cast.

The central books in this holistic reading are Deuteronomy, which summarizes the requirements of God for his people and calls them to faithfulness, and the two books of Joshua and Judges, which provide the pivot of the interpretative framework.

In this perspective, the book of Joshua is a theological reflection on the results of obedience; when God's people are faithful and live Torah, He is with them and brings His promises to fulfilment (Deut 30:20). As it stands within the canon, it recalls God's faithfulness and the possibilities that exist in an obedient people enabled by God's grace. The end of Joshua (24:14-15) reflects a sermon call to respond to His gracious self-revelation in faithfulness.

This means that the purpose of the book is not to duplicate "what happened" as Israel entered the land in a dispassionate way. Its purpose is to highlight the points at which the people were faithful to God and the blessings that faithfulness brought to the people. The Joshua traditions remember that not everything went smoothly as Israel entered the land, which the minority voice in the book is not at all embarrassed to tell. But the purpose is to relate the successes the people had to the call to faithfulness in Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch. The fact was, with all the reverses and failures Israel faced, and as difficult as it was to settle in the land, they did settle in the land. That very fact was enough to celebrate the blessings of God and the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers.

As far as the historical details, we should admit that there are some discrepancies in how the story is told in Joshua and how it is told in Judges and later traditions. But that should never be allowed to become the sole criteria of the reliability of the traditions or the truth about God to which it bears witness. It is only with assumptions forced by modern categories of thinking, such as absolute inerrancy or historical positivism, which makes such criteria the judge of Scripture in either direction.

This also means that the book of Judges serves a companion role to Joshua, a theological reflection on disobedience and the consequences that unfold from sin. When God's people failed to live torah, He would no longer fight for them

and would allow the consequences of their sin to work out. Canonically, it serves as an anticipation of Israel's failure, a foreshadowing of the end of Israel in the exile. All of Israel's history from the entry into the land to the Exile is anticipated in the failures portrayed in Judges. The end of Judges (21:25) anticipates how those consequences of sin would continue to work out in Israel's history. This is not a prophetic prediction of that failure, but a theological reflection on history from those who had already experienced it and were looking back at the traditions.

But there is an even more significant theological overtone in shaping the traditions in this way. While the Deuteronomic History serves as a theological critique of Israel's history, it also confesses something about how God works in the world. If the past has worked out in terms of consequences for sin and blessing for obedience, there is some hint that this understanding may well set the stage for the future as well. With Deuteronomy as the summary of God's requirements and a call to faithfulness, it might serve in the present as the people were in exile as much as in the past. In other words, while the book of Deuteronomy is set in Israel's past as the people were about to enter the land, it was reinterpreted to apply to the context of the exile. In that context, the call to obedience is no longer a recounting of history, but a very much contemporary call to respond to God's grace in the present.

This suggests that Joshua and Judges may be far more than just the theological recounting of history. They may be paradigms for response to God in any time. That is, Joshua extols the positive results and hope for a future that faithfulness to God and response to his grace entails. On the other hand Judges graphically illustrates the consequences of unfaithfulness to God and the rejection of God's instructions for "what is right" in our own eyes. This is not timeless truth; but is clearly a truth about God that transcends the historical context in which it is presented.

And so, the final impact and significance of Joshua may well be that call to faithfulness that is willing to launch into an unknown future on the promise that "I will be with you," because that is the only way to live in the land as God's people. And the final impact and significance of Judges may well be the warning of the consequences of failing to be God's people, of the dangers of allowing the adulteration of worship and commitment to God, and the endings that come because God's people refuse to follow torah in favor of their own way.

The historical issues in the book cannot be dismissed. But with this message, they seem less important.

The Book of Ruth

The book of Ruth tells the story of three people: Naomi, a widow from Bethlehem in Judah; Ruth, her daughter-in-law from Moab; and Boaz, a gentleman farmer from Bethlehem. Ruth, in a supreme act of devotion, follows Naomi home from Moab and there meets Boaz, Naomi's close relative. Boaz understands that Ruth, though a foreigner, is a woman of worth. Through a scheme of Naomi to send Ruth to meet Boaz in secret, and through the cleverness of Boaz, who claims Ruth before the city elders, Boaz and Ruth marry and have a child, thus insuring the continuation of the Davidic line that eventually leads to the birth of Jesus.

Bible Survey – Ruth

Hebrew Name - *Ruut* "friend"

Greek Name - *Oiktos* (Greek form of the Hebrew)

Author - Samuel (According to Tradition)

Date - From 1322 BC Approximately

Theme - The beginning of the lineage of Christ seen in this faithful woman who was a Moabite

Types and Shadows - In Ruth Jesus is the kinsman redeemer (Heb. Goel)

Summary of the Book of Ruth

1. The sorrows brought on the family of Elimelech because of the famine.
2. The return of Naomi to the land of Israel, Naomi's daughter-in-law.
3. The marriage of Ruth and Boaz.
4. The messianic genealogy from Judah to David.

This beautiful book is like a calmness in the middle of a turbulent storm, when reminiscing on all the violence and enemy invasions recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges. The book of Ruth deals more with real life in ancient Israel and not necessarily the warfare in the previous book, although the events actually took place during the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1). The date that the book was written is not given, and there is no mention as to who the author is, but it is most likely Samuel, who is the traditionally accepted author. The book of Ruth traces the messianic line of King David back to Ruth, who was a

Moabitess, and the book gives us a beautiful understanding of how God rewards faithfulness and devotion.

The events in Ruth's life may be summarized as follows :

Outline of the Book of Ruth

- 1) Due to a severe famine in the land of Judah, Elimelech, a native of Bethlehem, emigrated to Moab with his wife and two sons, who married two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah.
- 2) At the end of ten years, all three of the women were left widows and Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. Despite Naomi's protests, Ruth determined to return to Bethlehem with her. Ruth's dedication to Naomi and to the religion of the God of Israel is stated in Ruth 1:16-17: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."
- 3) They arrived in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest. Ruth went out to glean in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy man whose relationship with his servants eloquently attests to his character (Ruth 2:4). According to Hebrew law, Ruth had a right to demand that a near kinsman of her late husband take her for his wife. Boaz had been related to Ruth's husband and was willing to marry her, but since there was another man of closer kinship, it was necessary to go through certain customary and legal measures before he could rightfully claim her.
- 4) This being done, the two were married with the blessings of their neighbors and eventually became the parents of Obed, the grandfather of David.

The Book of Ruth in various Bible Dictionaries

Ruth in Easton's Bible Dictionary

A friend, a Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, whose father, Elimelech, had settled in the land of Moab. On the death of Elimelech and Mahlon, Naomi came with Ruth, her daughter-in-law, who refused to leave her, to Bethlehem, the old home from which Elimelech had migrated. There she had a rich relative, Boaz, to whom Ruth was eventually married. She became the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David. Thus Ruth, a Gentile, is among the maternal progenitors of our Lord (Matt. 1:5). The story of "the gleaner Ruth illustrates the friendly relations between the good Boaz and his reapers, the Jewish land system, the

method of transferring property from one person to another, the working of the Mosaic law for the relief of distressed and ruined families; but, above all, handing down the unselfishness, the brave love, the unshaken trustfulness of her who, though not of the chosen race, was, like the Canaanitess Tamar (Gen. 38:29; Matt. 1:3) and the Canaanitess Rahab (Matt. 1:5), privileged to become the ancestress of David, and so of 'great David's greater Son'" (Ruth 4:18-22).

Ruth in Fausset's Bible Dictionary

From Reuth, feminine of Reu, "friend." In beautiful contrast to Judges' end in internecine bloodshed, the book of Ruth is a picture of a peaceful, virtuous, filial obedience, and the rich reward of choosing the Lord at the sacrifice of all else. Orpah's end is shrouded in darkness, while Ruth is remembered to all generations as chosen ancestress of Messiah. Boaz' name is immortalized by linking himself with the poor Moabitess, while the kinsman who would not mar his own inheritance is unknown. Goethe said of this book, "we have nothing so lovely in the whole range of epic and idyllic poetry." Ruth is an instance of natural affection made instrumental in leading to true religion. A "blossom of pagandom stretching its flower cup desiringly toward the light of revelation in Israel." OBJECT. In Ruth 4:18-22 the author shows his aim, namely, to give a biographical sketch of the pious ancestors of David the king. The book contains the inner and spiritual background of the genealogies so prominent in Scripture. The family life of David's ancestors is sketched to show how they walked in single hearted piety toward God, and justice and love, modesty and purity towards man. "Ruth the Moabite, great-greatgrandmother of David, longed for the God and people of Israel with all the deepest earnestness of her nature, and joined herself to them with all the power of love. Boaz was an Israelite without guile, full of holy reverence for every ordinance of God and man, and full of benevolent love and friendliness toward the poor pagan woman. From such ancestors was the man descended in whom all the nature of Israel was to find its royal concentration and fullest expression." (Auberlen)...

Ruth in Smiths Bible Dictionary

A female friend, a Moabitish woman, the wife, first of Mahlon, second of Boaz, the ancestress of David and Christ, and one of the four women who are named by St. Matthew in the genealogy of Christ. A severe famine in the land of Judah induced Elimelech, a native of Bethlehem -- ephratah, to emigrate into the land of Moab, with his wife Naomi, and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. This was probably about the time of Gideon, B.C. 1250. At the end of ten years Naomi now left a widow and childless, having heard that there was plenty again in Judah, resolved to return to Bethlehem, and her daughter-in-law Ruth returned

with her. They arrived at Bethlehem just at the beginning of barley harvest, and Ruth, going out to glean, chanced to go into the field of wheat, a wealthy man and a near kinsman of her father-in-law, Elimelech. Upon learning who the stranger was, Boaz treated her with the utmost kindness and respect, and sent her home laden with corn which she had gleaned. Encouraged by this incident, Naomi instructed Ruth to claim at the hand of Boaz that he should perform the part of her husband's near kinsman, by purchasing the inheritance of Elimelech and taking her to be his wife. With all due solemnity, Boaz took Ruth to be his wife, amidst the blessings and congratulations of their neighbours. Their son, Obed, was 'the father of Jesse, who was the father of David.

Ruth in the Bible Encyclopedia - ISBE

Rooth (ruth; Rhouth): The name Ruth is found in the Old Testament only in the book which is so entitled. It is a contraction for re'uth perhaps signifying "comrade," "companion" (feminine; compare Ex 11:2, "every woman of her neighbor"). OHL, 946, explains the word as an abstract noun = "friendship." The Book of Ruth details the history of the one decisive episode owing to which Ruth became an ancestress of David and of the royal house of Judah. From this point of view its peculiar interest lies in the close friendship or alliance between Israel and Moab, which rendered such a connection possible. Not improbably also there is an allusion to this in the name itself. 1. History: The history lies in the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1), at the close of a great famine in the land of Israel. Elimelech, a native of Bethlehem, had, with his wife Naomi and two sons, taken refuge in Moab from the famine. There, after an interval of time which is not more precisely defined, he died (Ruth 1:3), and his two sons, having married women of Moab, in the course of a further ten years also died, and left Orpah and Ruth widows (Ruth 1:5). Naomi then decided to return to Israel, and her two daughters-in-law accompanied her on her way (Ruth 1:7). Orpah, however, turned back and only Ruth remained with Naomi, journeying with her to Bethlehem, where they arrived "in the beginning of barley harvest" (Ruth 1:22). The piety and fidelity of Ruth are thus early exhibited in the course of the narrative, in that she refused to abandon her mother-in-law, although thrice exhorted to do so by Naomi herself, on account of her own great age and the better prospects for Ruth in her own country. Orpah yielded to persuasion, and returned to Moab; but Ruth remained with Naomi. At Bethlehem Ruth employed herself in gleaning in the field during the harvest and was noticed by Boaz, the owner of the field, a near kinsman of her father-in-law Elimelech. Boaz gave her permission to glean as long as the harvest continued; and told her that he had heard of her filial conduct toward her mother-in-law. Moreover, he directed the reapers to make intentional provision for her by dropping in her way grain from their bundles (Ruth 2:15 f). She was thus able to return to Naomi in

the evening with a whole ephah of barley (Ruth 2:17). In answer to questioning she explained that her success in gleaning was due to the good-will of Boaz, and the orders that he had given. She remained accordingly and gleaned with his maidens throughout the barley and wheat harvest, making her home with her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:23). Naomi was anxious for the remarriage of Ruth, both for her sake and to secure compliance with the usage and law of Israel; and sent her to Boaz to recall to him his duty as near kinsman of her late husband Elimelech (Ruth 3:1 f). Boaz acknowledged the claim and promised to take Ruth in marriage, failing fulfillment of the legal duty of another whose relationship was nearer than that of Boaz himself (Ruth 3:8-13). Naomi was confident that Boaz would fulfill his promise, and advised Ruth to wait in patience...

Summary of the Book of Ruth

This beautiful book is like a calmness in the middle of a turbulent storm, when reminiscing on all the violence and enemy invasions recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges. The book of Ruth deals more with real life in ancient Israel and not necessarily the warfare in the previous book, although the events actually took place during the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1). The date that the book was written is not given, and there is no mention as to who the author is, but it is most likely Samuel, who is the traditionally accepted author. The book of Ruth traces the messianic line of King David back to Ruth, who was a Moabitess, and the book gives us a beautiful understanding of how God rewards faithfulness and devotion.

The Book of Ruth in Easton's Bible Dictionary

It was originally a part of the Book of Judges, but it now forms one of the twenty-four separate books of the Hebrew Bible. The history it contains refers to a period perhaps about one hundred and twenty-six years before the birth of David. It gives (1) an account of Naomi's going to Moab with her husband, Elimelech, and of her subsequent return to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law; (2) the marriage of Boaz and Ruth; and (3) the birth of Obed, of whom David sprang. The author of this book was probably Samuel, according to Jewish tradition. "Brief as this book is, and simple as is its story, it is remarkably rich in examples of faith, patience, industry, and kindness, nor less so in indications of the care which God takes of those who put their trust in him."

The Book of Ruth in the Bible Encyclopedia - ISBE

1.Order in the Canon: The place which the Book of Ruth occupies in the order of the books of the English Bible is not that of the Hebrew Canon. There it is one of the five meghilloth or Rolls, which were ordered to be read in the synagogue on 5 special occasions or festivals during the year. In printed editions

of the Old Testament the megilloth are usually arranged in the order: Cant, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther. Ruth occupied the second position because the book was appointed to be read at the Feast of Weeks which was the second of the 5 special days. In Hebrew manuscripts, however, the order varies considerably. In Spanish manuscripts generally, and in one at least of the German school cited by Dr. Ginsburg (Introduction to the Hebrew Bible, London, 1897, 4), Ruth precedes Cant; and in the former Ecclesiastes is placed before Lamentations. The meghilloth constitute the second portion of the kethubhim or Haigographa, the third great division of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Talmud, however, dissociates Ruth altogether from the remaining meghilloth, and places it first among the Hagiographa, before the Book of Psalms. By the Greek translators the book was removed from the position which it held in the Hebrew Canon, and because it described events contemporaneous with the Judges, was attached as a kind of appendix to the latter work. This sequence was adopted in the Vulgate, and so has passed into all modern Bibles...



Tomb of King David, Mount Zion in Jerusalem. This place on Mount Zion is the traditional site of the tomb of King David, and holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. On the ground level are several Jewish synagogues, and the site is one of the Holiest Jewish places. The second level is a holy place for Christians - the location of the "last supper", which is detailed in another page. The third level has a Muslim muezzin tower.



The synagogue of David's traditional tomb

The Book of Ruth is also Messianic

Matthew Chapter 1

- 1: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
- 2: Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;
- 3: And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;
- 4: And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;
- 5: And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;
- 6: And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;
- 7: And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;
- 8: And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;
- 9: And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;
- 10: And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;
- 11: And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were

carried away to Babylon:

12: And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;

13: And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

14: And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

15: And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

16: And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17: So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

18: Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19: Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

20: But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21: And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22: Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23: Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24: Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

25: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

The book of Ruth is also Messianic in two ways: it ties the Tribe of Judah to Bethlehem; it confirms the lineage of the House of David, where the Messiah would come from, to the Tribe of Judah, making a complete circle for the realization of Messianic prophecies. I believe this in itself is wonderful, not even

mentioning the fact that these two details are tucked in just the first and last verses of the book of Ruth.

The first detail, as the book of Joshua 19:15-16 records, is that Bethlehem is actually the inheritance of the children of Zebulun, "...and Bethlehem: twelve cities with their villages. This [is] the inheritance of the children of Zebulun according to their families, these cities with their villages." But looking closely, Ruth 1:1 declares: "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of "Bethlehemjudah" went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons."

Without the book of Ruth, there will be no direct connection between the Tribe of Judah and the city of Bethlehem. This is a very crucial component for the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies, because as often quoted in Micah 5:2 the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, [though] thou be little among the thousands of Judah, [yet] out of thee shall he come forth unto me [that is] to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth [have been] from of old, from everlasting."

As far as confirming the lineage of House of David being in the Tribe of Judah, there is an interesting controversy outlined in Ruth 4:12: "And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman." Pharez is a bastard son of Judah, and by law stated in Deuteronomy 23:2 "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD."

In the genealogy outlined in the book of Ruth, David is the tenth in line after Pharez. It confirms the Davidic Covenant that will be given in the future and ties the House of David in the lineage of the Tribe of Judah as Ruth 4:22 declares: "... And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David."

5. When it comes to Old Testament prophecy, which one is your personal favorite?

When it comes to Old Testament prophecy, my personal favorite is Ezekiel 36:26 "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

In the Spiritual Disciplines study, we have learned that the Jewish rabbis usually take four levels of scriptural application. They use the term "Pardes (Hebrew for paradise) Levels:" the p'shat is the plain, simple meaning of the text; the remez is where another (implied) meaning is alluded to in the text, usually revealing a

deeper meaning; the d'rash is a teaching or exposition or application of the P'shat and/or Remez, perhaps a sermon; and the sud is the hidden, secret or mystic meaning of a text.

The plain and simple application of this verse is that was spoken by the Lord to Ezekiel to be given to the people of Israel. It is God's promise to them to take them back into the Promised Land, not because they deserve it – but for the sake of His holy name. The alluded meaning is that the people of Israel failed to honor Him as their God and instead followed after false gods, yet even then, God's mercy is stronger because He honors and sanctifies His name. The teaching to be grasped here is that God values His name so much: we have to be very careful with how we represent Him to the world.

But the main thing I consider this verse as a personal favourite is because of the hidden, secret or mystic meaning: one for the children of Israel and one for you and me.

It is a great promise not only for the people of Israel at that historical period, but a promise already began to be fulfilled when God brought them together again as a nation in 1948. I desire to see the complete realization of how God's chosen people will come to have a new heart and new spirit to receive the Messiah in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a wonderful promise for you and me because we are assured by this verse that God will never leave us nor forsake us. Our justification does not rely on whether we deserve it or not, it stands fully upon the faithfulness of God. Once He gives us the new heart and new spirit, He will never take it back. It doesn't mean we will always exhibit the newness of our being; in fact, we can quench the Spirit of God from being revealed in our lives. Nonetheless, what a magnificent joy it brings to realize that God's has given you and me a new heart and a new spirit and, as Ezekiel continues in verse 27, "cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do [them]."

Generalities on I and II Samuel

The Books of Samuel (Hebrew: *Sefer Sh'muel* שְׁמוּאֵל) in the Jewish bible are part of the Former Prophets, (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings – the sequence of books in the Old Testament is identical, with the addition of Ruth), a theological history of the Israelites affirming and explaining the Torah (God's law for Israel) under the guidance of the prophets.

Samuel begins by telling how the prophet Samuel is chosen by Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, at his birth. The story of the Ark which follows tells of Israel's oppression by the Philistines, which brings about Samuel's anointing of Saul as

Israel's first king. But Saul proves unworthy and God's choice turns instead to David, who defeats Israel's enemies and brings the Ark to Jerusalem. God then promises David and his successors an eternal dynasty.

According to Jewish tradition the author was Samuel himself, but this idea is no longer regarded as tenable. Modern scholarly thinking is that it originated by combining a number of independent units, of various ages, when the larger Deuteronomistic history (the Former Prophets plus Deuteronomy) was being composed in the period c.630-540 BCE according to Jewish history.

The childless Hannah vows to Yahweh that if she has a son, he will be dedicated to Yahweh. Eli, the priest of Shiloh (where the ark of the covenant is located), blesses her, and a child named Samuel is born. Eli's sons prove unworthy of the priesthood and are destroyed by God, but the child Samuel grows up "in the presence of the Lord."

The Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh and take it to the temple of their god Dagon, who recognises the supremacy of Yahweh. The Philistines are afflicted with plagues and return the ark to the Israelites, but to the territory of the tribe of Benjamin rather than to Shiloh. The Philistines attack the Israelites gathered at Mizpah in Benjamin. Samuel appeals to Yahweh, the Philistines are decisively beaten, and the Israelites reclaim their lost territory.

In Samuel's old age, he appoints his sons as judges, but they are unworthy, and so the people clamour for a king. God reluctantly accedes and gives them Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul defeats the enemies of the Israelites, but commits sins against Yahweh.

Yahweh tells Samuel to anoint David of Bethlehem as king, and David enters Saul's court as his armour-bearer and harpist. Saul's son and heir Jonathan befriends David and recognises him as rightful king. Saul plots David's death, but David flees into the wilderness, where he becomes a champion of the Hebrews. David joins the Philistines, but continues secretly to champion his own people, until Saul and Jonathan are killed in battle.

The elders of Judah anoint David as king, but in the north Saul's son Ishbaal rules over the northern tribes. After a long war Ishbaal is murdered hoping for reward from David, but David has them killed for killing God's anointed. David is then anointed King of all Israel. David captures Jerusalem and brings the Ark there. David wishes to build a temple, but Nathan tells him that one of David's sons will be the one to build the temple. David defeats the enemies of Israel, slaughtering Philistines, Moabites, Edomites, Syrians and Arameans.

David commits adultery with Bathsheba and plots the death of her husband; for this God punishes him, saying that the sword shall never depart from his house. For the remainder of his reign there are problems: one of his sons rapes one of his daughters, another son kills the first, his favourite son rebels and is killed, until finally only two contenders for the succession remain, one of them Bathsheba's son Solomon. As David lies dying Bathsheba and Solomon plot Solomon's elevation to the throne.

Textual history

1 and 2 Samuel were originally a single book, but the first Greek translation, produced in the centuries immediately before Christ, divided it into two; this was adopted by the Latin translation used in the early Christian church of the West, and finally introduced into Jewish bibles around the early 16th century CE. The modern Hebrew text (called the Masoretic text) differs considerably from the Greek, and scholars are still working at finding the best solutions to the many problems this presents.

The Deuteronomistic history

Although details remain disputed, the vast majority of recent studies agree with Martin Noth's thesis, published in 1943, that the book of Samuel was composed as part of the Deuteronomistic history, the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Noth thought the History was composed by a single individual, but this idea has been more or less given up and modern scholars argue for multiple authors active over a considerable period, culminating in the mid-6th century. Further editing was apparently done even after that – the silver quarter-shekel which Saul's servant offers to Samuel in 1 Samuel 9 almost certainly fixes the date of this story in the Persian or Hellenistic periods.

Sources

The 6th century authors/editors drew on earlier sources, including (but not limited to) an "ark narrative" (1 Samuel 4:1-7:1 and part of 2 Samuel 6), a "Saul cycle" (parts of 1 Samuel 9-11 and 13-14), the "history of David's rise" (1 Samuel 16:14-2 Samuel 5:10), and the "succession narrative" (2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2). The sources used to construct 1 & 2 Samuel are:

Call of Samuel or *Youth of Samuel* (1 Samuel 1-7): From Samuel's birth his career as Judge and prophet over Israel. This source includes the *Eli narrative* and part of the ark narrative.

Ark narrative (1 Samuel 4:1b-7:1 and 2 Samuel 6:1-20): the ark's capture by the Philistines in the time of Eli and its transfer to Jerusalem by David – opinion is divided over whether this is actually an independent unit.

Jerusalem source: a fairly brief source discussing David conquering Jerusalem from the Jebusites.

Republican source: a source with an anti-monarchial bias. This source first describes Samuel as decisively ridding the people of the Philistines, and begrudgingly appointing an individual chosen by God to be king, namely Saul. David is described as someone renowned for his skill at playing the harp, and consequently summoned to Saul's court to calm his moods. Saul's son Jonathan becomes friends with David, which some commentators view as romantic, and later acts as his protector against Saul's more violent intentions. At a later point, having been deserted by God on the eve of battle, Saul consults a medium at Endor, only to be condemned for doing so by Samuel's ghost, and told he and his sons will be killed. David is heartbroken on discovering the death of Jonathan, tearing his clothes apart.

Monarchial source: a source with a pro-monarchial bias and covering many of the same details as the *republican source*. This source begins with the divinely appointed birth of Samuel. It then describes Saul as leading a war against the Ammonites, being chosen by the people to be king, and leading them against the Philistines. David is described as a shepherd boy arriving at the battlefield to aid his brothers, and is overheard by Saul, leading to David challenging Goliath and defeating the Philistines. David's warrior credentials lead to women falling in love with him, including Michal, Saul's daughter, who later acts to protect David against Saul. David eventually gains two new wives as a result of threatening to raid a village, and Michal is redistributed to another husband. At a later point, David finds himself seeking sanctuary amongst the Philistine army and facing the Israelites as an enemy. David is incensed that anyone should have killed Saul, even as an act of mercy, since Saul was anointed by Samuel, and has the individual responsible killed.

Court History of David or Succession narrative (2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2): a "historical novel", in Alberto Soggin's phrase, telling the story of David's reign from his affair with Bathsheba to his death. The theme is of retribution: David's sin against Uriah the Hittite is punished by God through the destruction of his own family, and its purpose is to serve as an apology for the coronation of Bathsheba's son Solomon instead of his older brother Adonijah. *Redactions*: additions by the redactor to harmonise the sources together; many of the uncertain passages may be part of this editing.

Various: several short sources, none of which have much connection to each other, and are fairly independent of the rest of the text. Many are poems or pure lists.

The Hebrew text of Samuel is widely recognised to be heavily corrupted with errors (meaning that scribes, over the centuries, have introduced many mistakes while copying the original version), while in addition the Greek and Hebrew versions differ considerably; modern scholars are still working at finding the best solutions to the many problems this presents.

Themes

The Book of Samuel is a theological evaluation of kingship in general and of dynastic kingship and David in particular. The main themes of the book are introduced in the opening poem (the “Song of Hannah”): (1), the sovereignty of Yahweh, the God of Israel; (2), the reversal of human fortunes; and (3), kingship. These themes are played out in the stories of the three main characters, Samuel, Saul and David.

Samuel

Samuel answers the description of the “prophet like Moses” predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15-22: like Moses, he has direct contact with Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, acts as a judge, and is a perfect leader who never makes mistakes. Samuel’s successful defence of the Israelites against their enemies demonstrates that they have no need for a king (who will, moreover, introduce inequality), yet despite this the people demand a king. But the king they are given is Yahweh’s gift, and Samuel explains that kingship can be a blessing rather than a curse if they remain faithful to their God. On the other hand, total destruction of both king and people will result if they turn to wickedness.

Saul

Saul is the chosen one, a king appointed by Yahweh the God of Israel and anointed by Samuel, Yahweh’s prophet, and yet he is ultimately rejected. Saul loses the chance to establish his dynasty and even to continue to reign through two faults: he carries out a sacrifice in place of Samuel (1 Samuel 13:8-14), and he fails to carry out genocide against the Amalekites as God has ordered (1 Samuel 15). The Deuteronomist’s negative view of Saul and desire to show David as the first real king of Israel has obscured Saul’s real achievements.

David

One of the main units within Samuel is the “History of David’s Rise”, the purpose of which is to justify David as the legitimate successor to Saul. The

narrative stresses that he gained the throne lawfully, always respecting “the Lord’s anointed” (i.e. Saul) and never taking any of his numerous chances to seize the throne by violence. As God’s chosen king over Israel David is also the son of God (“I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me...” – 2 Samuel 7:14). God enters into an eternal covenant (treaty) with David and his line, promising divine protection of the dynasty and of Jerusalem through all time.^[27] The story can be compared to that of a 13th century Hittite king who was forced to take the throne after a lifetime of loyalty when his life was in danger: like David, he was assisted by his god, whose divine will decided the course of events.

Samuel I

We are not ready for the Book of 1 Samuel until after we have read the Book of Judges, but we did. These days of the judges were dark days for the nation Israel. God had delivered the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. Due to their unbelief, the first generation of Israelites failed to enter the promised land. The second generation entered Canaan, and under the leadership of Joshua, did reasonably well. But after the death of Joshua, things began to fall apart. Israel went through repetitive cycles of blessing and discipline, the result of their obedience or rebellion. When Israel disobeyed, God gave the nation over to an oppressive enemy. When the Israelites repented and cried out to God, He sent a “judge” to deliver them. When that judge died, the people of Israel returned to their sin. The cycle seemed to be endless.

One might conclude from reading the Book of Judges that the problem was the absence of a king in Israel: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). In 1 Samuel, Israel will get her king. Saul, Israel’s first king, will be the kind of king the people want, and prove to be the king Israel deserves. David, Israel’s second king, will replace Saul. He is God’s kind of king, a man after God’s heart. 1 Samuel tells the story of fascinating people like Hannah and Samuel, like Saul and David. There is never a dull moment in this masterfully well written history. The book closes with the death of Saul, and thus the end of David’s flight from the hand of Saul, who seeks to kill him as an enemy.

While the people and events of 1 Samuel are from long ago and from far away, the struggles these men and women faced are the same as ours today, as we seek to live in a fallen world in a way that is pleasing to God. There are many ways in which we can identify with these ancient Israelites, and many lessons we can learn from their successes and failures. As we embark on our study, let us do so with a sense of expectation, praying that God may change us and work in our

lives as He did in the lives of these men and women of old. May God use this book to make us men and women after His heart.

1. Samuel's birth and boyhood

Verses 1-18. Hannah's prayer and vow

Verses 19-28. Samuel born and given to God

Samuel 1:1-2:10

In our English Bibles, the Book of 1 Samuel follows the Book of Ruth. In the Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts, 1 Samuel immediately follows the Book of Judges. And so it is in the Hebrew Bible that the last words to be written before our text in 1 Samuel are these:

25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

“Those days” were far from the high water mark of Israel’s spiritual life as a nation. The Book of Judges describes chaotic days in which the Israelites were often oppressed by the surrounding nations. God would send a judge to deliver them, but their freedom lasted only as long as the judge lived. Even their judges were less than model saints. Samson, for example, was a man whose life was dominated by the flesh, rather than the Spirit. The writer of Judges links Israel’s spiritual decay and political chaos to the absence of a king. The book of 1 Samuel records the process by which God provided His people with a king. Like Elizabeth in the New Testament, Hannah is the mother of the prophet who will designate God’s chosen king. Saul will be anointed as Israel’s first king. Then after his rejection by God, David will be anointed as the head of an eternal dynasty. In the midst of spiritual anemia, Hannah and her husband, Elkanah, stand head and shoulders above their peers. Let us listen to this story and the psalm of praise that serves as its climax.

The Story Retold

Elkanah is a godly descendant of Levi, who lives in the hill country of Ephraim. Because of his place of residence, he is known as an Ephraimite, although he is really of the tribe of Levi (see 1 Chronicles 6:33-38). Elkanah has two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah bears children to Elkanah, but Hannah does not (1:2), because God has closed her womb (1:6).

Every year, Elkanah, Peninnah and her children, and barren Hannah go up to Shiloh, some 20 miles or so north of Jerusalem where the tabernacle is stationed. They go there to observe one of three annual feasts (1:3; see Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 16:16). This very special time is to be a time of rejoicing, and sadness is prohibited:

17 “You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain, or new wine, or oil, or the first-born of your herd or flock, or any of your votive offerings which you vow, or your freewill offerings, or the contribution of your hand. 18 But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; *and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all your undertakings*” (Deuteronomy 12:17-18, emphasis mine).

For Hannah, and probably for Elkanah as well, rejoicing before the Lord is most difficult. First, the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, minister there as priests (1:3). For those who are truly righteous, these pathetic priests cast a dark cloud over genuine worship (see 2:12-17, 22-25). But the primary source of Hannah’s pain on this annual trek to Shiloh is that Peninnah takes advantage of this good opportunity to harass Hannah year after year without letting up (see 1:4-7). This results in many tears for Hannah and an inability to join in with the festive meal (1:7).

It is not that Elkanah, her husband, does not try to comfort her or to come to her aid. Elkanah assures her of his love by giving her a double portion of the meat which has been sacrificed (1:5). He makes sincere efforts to compensate for her barrenness, reminding her of what she means to him and what he intends to be for her (1:8). In spite of all this, Hannah dreads the annual pilgrimage to Shiloh where she must live in close proximity to Peninnah, her tormentor.

It is not difficult to envision how this happens. During the year, Hannah and Peninnah probably live in separate tents, well distanced from each other. They do not all eat at the same table. But on the annual trek to Shiloh, they must all travel and eat together. When the sacrificial meat is eaten, a portion is given to each wife. While it is true that Hannah receives a double portion, Peninnah is given enough meat for herself and her children. I can just hear Peninnah cruelly tormenting Hannah: “Oh my, Elkanah, what a lovely large piece of meat for me and all my children! Oh dear, what nice little pieces you have too Hannah.”

On this particular trip to Shiloh, Hannah barely makes it through the meal. Somehow she fortifies herself against Peninnah’s cruel remarks and actions. But after eating and drinking, she hurries off from the family to find her way to the tabernacle, where she pours out her soul to God. Inside, she prays silently as Eli,

sitting by the doorway, looks on with interest. He sees her shoulders heaving as she sobs in great distress and weeps bitterly (1:10). Not hearing her words, Eli jumps to the wrong conclusion, assuming that she has been celebrating too much, and that her happiness is inappropriate drunkenness. He rebukes her for drunkenness and instructs her to give up this kind of drinking (1:13-14).

Hannah quickly assures Eli she is not drunk at all, but that she is pouring out her soul before the Lord (1:15). She begs him not to condemn her as a worthless woman (1:16). Ironically, the word Hannah uses (**“worthless”**) is the very term the author uses in chapter 2 (verse 12) to describe the two sons of Eli. She informs him that she has, up to this moment, been speaking out of her agony of soul.

We know, as perhaps Eli knew as well, that among those words which Hannah sobs out to God is a vow. She promises God that if He will grant her a son, she will give that son back to Him as a Nazarite (1:11; see Numbers 6:1-21; Judges 13:2-7). Eli assures Hannah that God will grant her petition and bless her (1:17). From that moment on, Hannah is able to enter into the worship celebration. She eats the meal, her face now radiating with joy rather than sorrow.

Arising early in the morning, they worship the Lord before making their way back home to Ramah. Some time later, Hannah conceives and bears the promised child. Hannah names the child Samuel. While scholars debate over the terms and their meanings, we are told what the name means to her. She knows that this is the child she asked of the Lord, and that he is the answer to her prayer (1:20). The name Samuel is a constant reminder of this child’s origin and destiny.

While the child is still nursing, the time arrives for the family to make its annual trek to Shiloh. Elkanah goes up with the rest of his family, but Hannah remains behind. She is not trying to avoid keeping her vow (see 1:21-23). Quite the contrary! From the words spoken with her husband, I conclude she does not wish to go up with Samuel and then return home with him afterwards, because he is still nursing and cannot be left at Shiloh so early in life. Her intention seems to be to stay home this time and to wean the child within the year. She will then take Samuel with her when the time comes for the next journey to Shiloh, never to return home to Ramah as a child. Hannah may not have wanted to set a precedent of going to Shiloh with Samuel and then returning home with him for fear she might be tempted not to keep her vow.

The time comes when the child is weaned, and Hannah must take Samuel with her to Shiloh and leave him there with Eli. He is still young, but old enough to be cared for by someone other than his mother (see 1:24). The three-year-old bull they take with them is slaughtered and brought to Eli. Hannah reminds Eli

that she is the woman who stood beside him, praying so fervently that he assured her God would grant her petition. She tells him that to fulfill her vow she has brought her child to give to the Lord. Shortly, she will leave the child behind under the care of Eli. Before she leaves, she offers a prayer of praise to the Lord, a prayer by which Hannah will long be remembered.

2. The failure of Eli's house

Verses 1-11. Hannah's ode

Verses 12-36. Failure of Eli's house

Hannah's Psalm (2 :1-10)

1 Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, Because I rejoice in Thy salvation.

2 "There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides Thee, Nor is there any rock like our God. 3 "Boast no more so very proudly, Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth; For the LORD is a God of knowledge, And with Him actions are weighed. 4 "The bows of the mighty are shattered, But the feeble gird on strength. 5 "Those who were full hire themselves out for bread, But those who were hungry cease *to hunger*. Even the barren gives birth to seven, But she who has many children languishes. 6 "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. 7 "The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts. 8 "He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap To make them sit with nobles, And inherit a seat of honour; For the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, And He set the world on them. 9 "He keeps the feet of His godly ones, But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; For not by might shall a man prevail. 10 "Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; Against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; And He will give strength to His king, And will exalt the horn of His anointed."

In Hannah's psalm of praise, there a number of features well worth noting. As we look at them, perhaps they will stimulate you to do a much more thorough study of this text on your own.

First, Hannah's prayer is a psalm.

A number of the translations indicate this by the way they format the text. It looks just like one of the psalms from the Book of Psalms. Hannah's prayer employs parallelism and symbolism, which is typical of a psalm.

Second, Hannah's psalm is a prayer, a prayer Hannah may have prepared in advance for her worship.

In the majesty of these words, let us not forget that this is Hannah's prayer of praise. It is a psalm, but like the psalms, it is a prayer addressed to God, a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. Some almost automatically assume that Hannah borrowed this psalm as the expression of her praise to God. The psalms of the Bible wonderfully put our prayers into words that very aptly describe what is in our hearts, but there is no indication that this is anything but a psalm Hannah composed herself. Do we think her incapable of such a magnificent work? Or do we think that God cannot put such praise in our hearts? Read on.

Third, Hannah's psalm is now a part of Scripture.

Her psalm is no longer a private work of her own, but a permanent part of the Holy Scriptures for all of us to read, to repeat (if we choose), and to edify our .

Fourth, Hannah's psalm is therefore an inspired psalm

Inspired psalm by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; . . ." (2 Timothy 3:16). Since this psalm is a part of the Holy Scriptures, we know it is inspired by God through the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 2 Peter 1:21). Are Hannah's words beyond her own natural capacity to articulate? So are the words of every inspired author of Scripture. This is precisely why we can easily accept that Hannah penned this psalm by the enablement of the Holy Spirit.

Fifth, Hannah's psalm is the outgrowth of her own experiences.

The Scriptures are not mechanically transmitted through their human authors. In some mysterious way (as mysterious as the way in which our Lord is both divine and human), God's revelation is produced through human instruments, out of their own background and experiences, expressing their individual personalities, and yet in a way which accurately and inerrantly conveys the very words of God.

Sixth, Hannah's psalm also appears to reflect Israel's experiences with God in the past.

Inspired Scripture has a way of linking itself with the rest of Scripture. Hannah's words of praise in her psalm seem to flow, in part, from Israel's experiences in the past, particularly the exodus. Often an inspired writer's words or expressions are borrowed from other biblical texts, and sometimes they seem to be an almost unconscious part of the fabric of the author's thinking. Hannah speaks of God as her "rock" (verse 2). God is described as Israel's "Rock" in Deuteronomy

32:30-31. Hannah speaks of God as exalting her “**horn**” in verse 1; Moses uses the symbolism of the “**horn**” in Deuteronomy 33:17. When Hannah speaks of the weak and humble being elevated to power and prominence, was this not true of Israel at the exodus? When Israel speaks of the hungry being fed, was this not also true at the exodus? When she speaks of the powerful being humbled, was this not true of Egypt at the exodus? I believe Hannah viewed God’s work in her life through the perspective of God’s work in Israel’s life at the exodus.

Seventh, Hannah’s prayer goes far beyond her own experience, focusing on the character of the one true God whom she worships and to whom she gives praise.

Unlike Jonah’s “psalm” (Jonah 2), but very much like the psalms found in the Book of Psalms, Hannah’s psalm does not concentrate on her sorrow, her suffering, or even on her blessings. Hannah’s psalm focuses on her God. Out of her suffering and exaltation, she comes to see God more clearly, and as a result, she praises Him for who and what He is. Her psalm speaks of God as holy (verse 2), as faithful (“rock,” verse 2), as omniscient (all knowing, verse 3), as gracious (verse 8), as all powerful (verse 6), as sovereign, the great reverser of circumstances (verses 6-10). How much there is of God in these few verses!

Eighth, Hannah’s prayer goes far beyond her experience, beyond the past and present, looking far ahead into the future.

Hannah’s psalm is prophetic; it is prophecy. It looks forward to the time when Israel will have a king (verse 10). I believe it looks forward to the coming of the ultimate “**King**,” our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate fulfilment of her messianic prophecy. Is this not one of the reasons Mary’s “psalm” has a familiar ring to us (see Luke 1:46-55)? It is true, of course, that Mary may see other parallels between her blessing and that of Hannah, but I do not think the messianic connection is ignored.

Ninth, we should not overlook that while Hannah’s psalm is the expression of her great joy and praise, it is offered at the time she must leave her son behind, never again to have him in her home.

This is a time when Hannah expresses her joy and gratitude to God for Samuel, the answer to her prayers. It is a time when Hannah expresses her faith in God and her devotion to Him. But it is also a time of separation when she will leave Samuel in Shiloh and return to Ramah. God’s faithfulness in the past is her assurance of His faithfulness in the future, and thus she can give this child to God.

Conclusion

Our text reveals the godliness of both Hannah and Elkanah as a backdrop against the poor parenting of Eli and the worthlessness of his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Elkanah is a godly husband who is sensitive to his wife's agony of soul. He seeks to encourage her in deed (he gives her a double portion of the sacrificial meat and speaks kind and gentle words of encouragement to her, assuring her of his love for her, regardless of whether she bears any children). He gently reminds her that her spirit of sadness is inappropriate to her worship. He grants her freedom to worship without smothering her or dictating her every action. He lets her go to worship alone, where she makes a vow. While he could have nullified her vow, he does not. He allows her the freedom to decide when she will go up to Shiloh with Samuel.

Elkanah is also a godly man in his relationship with God. He is concerned that his wife does the right thing before God. He is faithful to make the annual trek to Shiloh, even though there are good excuses for not doing so. He could say that he doesn't have the time or that it is too expensive. More to the point, he could point to the corruption of the priesthood, especially Hophni and Phinehas, saying that he doesn't want to expose his family to their hypocrisy, immorality, or brutality. He knows full well that at this time of annual worship Peninnah makes things especially difficult for Hannah and for him. In spite of all these reasons for not worshipping God at Shiloh, one could expect to see him there year after year.

Hannah is an example of a godly woman and wife. She endures years of silent suffering because of her barrenness and cruel harassment at the hand of her rival, Peninnah. She accompanies her husband and family (including Peninnah) to Shiloh, knowing how painful it always is. Largely she suffers silently, with no indication that she retaliates against her counterpart, Peninnah. She faithfully worships God, pouring out her tears and petitions. And when God answers her prayers, she not only keeps her vow, she praises God in a way that continues to inspire and encourage saints throughout the centuries. As surely as Eli's parental failures played a part in the shameful conduct of his sons as priests, so the godliness of Hannah and her husband positively influence Samuel's priesthood. And they positively influence us as examples of godly faith and action today.

Our text lays the foundation for the unfolding of the events depicted in 1 and 2 Samuel.

The last verse of the Book of Judges speaks once again of the fact that Israel has no king at this time. Hannah's prophetic psalm speaks of the coming of a king. Hannah and Elkanah, like their New Testament counterparts, Zacharias and Elizabeth (see Luke 1), are childless. Both barren wives become the mother of a

prophet, who designates the coming king. As Samuel designates both Saul and David, so John the Baptist designates Jesus the Nazarene as God's Messiah and King.

Hannah's worship provides great insight into the role of women in worship in the Old Testament times. Her role is not a public or official one, yet she continues to have great spiritual impact on saints down through the ages. Conversely, Eli's official status and public visibility does nothing for his spiritual life or the spiritual lives of his sons. Hannah, in her silent suffering, and in her quiet and unseen ministry to Samuel, has a great and lasting impact on her times and ours as well. Hannah's prayer of petition, which expresses her vow to God, is silent, but the result of her prayer has national significance. Her prayer of praise is a part of Holy Scripture and the source of great instruction, comfort, and encouragement. While she had no official leadership position and her ministry was private, she still had great spiritual impact. Let those men or women who wish prominence, visibility, position, and status learn from the way God used Hannah and her ministry.

Hannah's suffering and her psalm is a paradigm of the way God reveals Himself through the Scriptures.

Hannah's psalm, like all the rest of the Scriptures, is the product of human effort, superintended and divinely empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is both the product of human effort and the expression of a human personality, shaped by the things Hannah experienced. She could not have written this portion of Scripture without having suffered as she did at the hand of Peninnah, due to her barrenness. Neither could Hannah have written what she did about the future without divine inspiration. Her words which have been recorded for us are also the word of God.

Hannah's psalm, like every other portion of Scripture, is the writing of a person which reflects her education, her personality, and her background of experiences. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit, which conveys **the "mind of God"** to us. Just as our Lord was both undiminished deity and perfect humanity in one Person, so the Scriptures are the product of man and the work of God in one work.

Hannah's psalm could not have been written without the suffering which precedes it. It is God who closes Hannah's womb. It is God who purposes for her to suffer at the hand of her cruel counterpart, Peninnah. It is God who orchestrates all of the painful and pleasant events in Hannah's life, so that the resulting psalm could become the masterpiece it is. This is the way God employs the human and the divine in the writing of all the Scriptures. While you and I do not write Scripture today, I believe God orchestrates our background and our

lives in a way which uniquely prepares and equips us for the ministry He has for us. Let us refuse to see our past difficulties as hindrances to the present or the future. As we look back upon the painful memories of our past, let us look upon them as the foundation stones for our present and future ministry, and then let us rejoice in our tribulations and trials in light of the way God purposes to use them for our good and for His glory.

Our text is a picture of the way God brings about His blessings and manifests His grace in the midst of sorrow, suffering, and human weakness.

Having just concluded a study of 1 and 2 Corinthians, I cannot help but see the parallels between Hannah's experiences and psalm and Paul's experiences and epistles. Think about these words from the pen of Paul in light of Hannah's suffering and her resulting psalm: 7b . . .there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:7b-10).

As Paul makes so clear in his epistles, God's power is demonstrated at the point of our weaknesses. That is grace. God's grace does not seek out our strong points and enhance them, so much as His grace seeks out our weakest points so that it may be absolutely clear to all that it is God who accomplishes great things through us. Those things which cause Hannah the greatest sorrow, the greatest pain, are the very things God uses to produce her greatest joys. For those who trust in Him, it will always be this way:

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Romans 8:28-30).

Do you love God? Are you one of His children by faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in your place? This is the good news of the gospel. The gospel is not good news for those who think they are righteous. It is an offense. Such people think God owes them eternal life, and they despise God's saving grace in Christ as "charity." It is charity!

Those who joyfully embrace the good news of the gospel know they are helplessly and hopelessly lost in their sins, worthy only of God's eternal wrath. They rejoice in the fact that what they cannot do to earn God's salvation, Christ has done for them by His death, burial, and resurrection. They gratefully receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of righteousness as divine charity. And they come to learn that the same principle of divine grace, by which they are saved, is the principle by which God continues to work in their lives.

I pray that you have received the grace of God through the gift of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. If not, I pray that you will receive it and Him this very hour.

3. *Samuel's call*

Verses 1-18. The call

Verses 19-21. Samuel's prophetic ministry

4. *Judgment of Eli's house*

Verses 1-22. The death of Eli and his sons

Archaeological light

Shiloh was located nine miles North of Bethel. Such a tribal religious focal point (shrine) has numerous parallels in ancient extra-biblical cultures. Cf. The Delphic amphictyony in Greece, the Etruscan amphictyony in Italy, the temple of moon-god Sin at Haran, and the shrine of Belit –ekali at Qatna, as well as the temples at Nineveh, Ashur, and Nippur. The destruction of Shiloh (c. 1050 b.c.) is confirmed by the Danish excavations at the site (Cf. Jer. 7:12-15; 26:6-7).

1 Samuel 2:11-4:22

We must read, interpret, and apply our text in the light of its context. Our text in chapter 2 sets the scene for the events in chapter 4 by contrasting the life of Samuel with the lives of Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Alternating between Samuel and the **two "sons of Belial,"** our text contrasts Samuel with Eli's sons. I like the way Dale Ralph Davis illustrates the intertwining of Samuel and the sons of Belial:

Samuel serving, 2:11

Liturgical sins, 2:12-17

Samuel serving, 2:18-21

Moral sins, 2:22-25

Samuel growing, 2:26

Prophecy of judgment, 2:27-36

Samuel serving, 3:1a

The writer describes in chapter 3 the rise of Samuel to the office of the priesthood and to the office of a prophet. By the end of chapter 3, the entire nation accepts and reveres Samuel as a true prophet of God. Chapter 4 describes the fulfilment of God's prophetic warnings regarding Eli and his sons (both by the unnamed prophet in chapter 2 and by Samuel in chapter 3). Israel suffers defeat at the hands of the Philistines, the Ark is captured and taken away, and Eli and his two sons die, along with his daughter-in-law. The warnings and prophecies of chapters 2 and 3 must be read in the light of their fulfilment in chapter 4.

Understanding the Priesthood

We must know more about the Levitical priests to fully grasp what is going on with the sons of Eli. It is Aaron and his sons who are first designated by God to serve as priests. Nadab and Abihu, the two oldest sons of Aaron, are put to death for failing to exercise their priesthood correctly. They offer "strange fire" and are put to death for it. They are then replaced by Aaron's other sons, Eleazar and Ithamar (Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 3:4; 26:60-61).

The priests have various duties. They are to maintain and operate the tabernacle (Exodus 27:21; Leviticus 24:1-7; Numbers 18:1-7). Included in these duties is the maintaining of the altar. They are to keep the ashes removed and the fire burning (Leviticus 6:8-13). God promises to be with them in a special way at the doorway of the tent of meeting (Exodus 29:42-46). Because of their privileged position and close proximity to the Holy God, they are to be meticulous about not defiling themselves in any way that hinders their service. This includes avoiding strong drink (Leviticus 10:8-11), which may have been a contributing factor in the "**strange fire**" of Nadab and Abihu (10:1-3). They must not defile themselves by contact with the dead, by taking a harlot as a wife, or by having a daughter who is a harlot (Leviticus 21:1-9). A priest must not have any physical defect or conduct his priestly duties while ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 21:10—22:9). The Levitical priests are responsible for inspecting various medical maladies to determine if they are leprous, infectious or defiling (see Leviticus 13-16). Levitical priests are to blow the trumpets which signal the Israelites (Numbers 10:8). The priest's duties are even more extensive than this,

for they are to teach the people of Israel the Law of Moses, and they are to judge them (Deuteronomy 17:8-13; 33:8-11). The priests' failure to do these things brings severe judgment upon them (Malachi 2:1-10). Their garments, which include a tunic and a robe, are also symbols of the sanctity of their office and duties (Exodus 28:40-43).

God does not give the priests an inheritance like the other tribes (Numbers 18:24). Instead, He provides for them in a special way. They are given a portion of the meat which they offer on behalf of the Israelites, and they are given the remainder of the tithes and offerings of the people which the people bring as an offering to God (Numbers 18:8-32). They are also given the bread that is set out in the sanctuary to eat (Leviticus 24:8-9). God specifies the portion of the sacrificial animal the priests are given: the breast and the right thigh, but this is only after the fat has been burned on the altar (Leviticus 7:31-34; see also 3:3-5, 14-17; 7:22-25).

Eli's sons were worthless men (2:12-7)

12 Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD
13 and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. 14 Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." 16 And if the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give *it to me* now; and if not, I will take it by force." 17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD.

We have already seen how God provides for the needs of the priests. When they offer a sacrifice, they must first offer up the fat as an offering to God. The one making the sacrifice receives a portion of the sacrificial meat to be eaten with his family (see 1:5). The priest is given the breast and the right thigh (see above). This is the way the Law of Moses spells it out, but it is not the way it is done by the priests. These men **"did not know the Lord,"** and neither did they know **"the custom of the priests"** (verses 12-13).² These sons, who **"did not know the Lord,"** are called here the **"sons of Belial"** (literally), or **"worthless men"** (verse 12).³ It is very interesting to note that while Eli's sons are called

“sons of Belial,” Eli’s hasty assessment and rebuke of Hannah suggests to him that she is a **“daughter of Belial”** (see 1:16), a charge she denies.

What do these **“worthless sons”** of Eli actually do that is so wrong? The writer tells us. First, they refuse to take the portions assigned to them and insist on a “pot luck” approach to the selection of their meat. When the meat is boiling in the pot and someone comes to offer a sacrifice, the priest sends his servant with a three-pronged fork to take out whatever portion he stabs (2:13-14). This portion of meat is then taken to the priest as his portion of the sacrificial animal.

I do not think that what the priests were given to eat was a matter of chance either. The breast portion or a piece of thigh did not represent T-bone steaks for them because that was from the loin -- round steak, yes, rump roast, yes, but filet mignon, no -- unless, of course, the priest’s servant “just happened” to pull it out of the kettle. I doubt if these fellows made many mistakes about what piece of meat was taken for the priest. There would be no chuck steaks for these fellows and no neck bones either. In the way they selected the meat, the priests cast aside the law, satisfying their tastes by obtaining the most select cuts.

The priests seem to find boiled beef too bland, wanting barbecued (or broiled) beef instead. The priest’s servants approach those offering their sacrifices before the meat is cooked, even before the fat is offered to God, and demand a prime cut of select beef for the priests. Godly Israelites, like Elkanah and Hannah, know the fat must first be burned on the altar. When these folks urge the servant of the priest to wait at least until the fat is burned, the servant becomes more forceful. He demands the priest’s meat on the spot, threatening to take it by force if necessary.

One can only imagine the negative impact of all this on the worship of God at Shiloh. Godly Israelites making the annual trek to Shiloh to worship God at the tabernacle do not find devout priests who facilitate their worship, but devouring priests who frustrate worship. Either wilfully or by ignorance (this will be evident in one’s translation of verses 12 and 13), the priests function in a way which completely disregards the sacred office of the Old Testament priest, and which may cause some Israelites to give up entirely their attempt to worship at the tabernacle. In these days, there is no king in Israel, and each man does what is right in his own eyes, including the priests who are supposed to teach and judge Israel according to God’s law.

God’s assessment of the priests’ conduct is given to us in verse 17: **“Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the Lord.”** Translators handle this verse in different ways. Some render the verse to indicate that, as a result of the corruption of the priests’

ministry, the people likewise begin to follow their leaders in disdainning the sacrifices:

17 Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD (King James Version).

Others translate it to indicate that the priests' sin was very great, because they (the priests) abhor the offering of the Lord:

17 Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD; for they treated the offerings of the LORD with contempt (New Revised Standard Version).

I suspect both are true. The priests do not esteem the sacrifices and offerings which they offer on men's behalf at Shiloh, and as a result, many people come to disdain them as well. This is indeed a very grave sin, for the priests who lead others into sin and for those who follow them as well. This indeed is a very sad day in Israel's history. How well these later words of Malachi apply to the days of the Judges:

1 "And now, this commandment is for you, O priests. 2 "If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart. 3 "Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. 4 "Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 5 "My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him *as an object of* reverence; so he revered Me, and stood in awe of My name. 6 "True instruction was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. 7 "For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways, but are showing partiality in the instruction (Malachi 2:1-9).

A little wearing boy?

(2:18-21)

18 Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, *as* a boy wearing a linen ephod. 19 And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20 Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, “May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD.” And they went to their own home. 21 And the LORD visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD.

Our text seems to be so warm and sentimental. The mental picture our author draws of this young lad is touching. I can hear someone say, “Isn’t that sweet . . .?” It is sweet. Hannah has had to leave her one precious son behind at Shiloh, keeping her vow. Each year she comes to Shiloh to worship, but she also comes to see her beloved son. And each year she brings with her the little garments she has so caringly made over the previous months. She probably has to make a few alterations on his garments and attempt to estimate his size next year for her next months of sewing. Can’t you just see little Samuel all decked out in his new clothes? Isn’t it sweet?

Yes it is, but so is the fact that each year for the next several years mother Hannah is accompanied by another child, ending up with three little boys and two girls – six children in all, counting Samuel. Eli looks at the tearful parting of Elkanah and Hannah and pronounces a blessing on them, asking that God replace the child Hannah has dedicated to the Lord. God answers, graciously granting them five additional children. Eli also realizes that in place of his two worthless sons, God has given him a son to raise, a son who must have been a joy to this elderly priest’s heart.

More than mere sentimental feeling is communicated here, however. One might think that since Samuel lives so far from his parent’s home, Hannah and Elkanah have little influence on Samuel’s life. I believe they have much influence on Samuel. If I read 1 Samuel 2:19 in light of the teaching of the Law on the priest’s garments, then Hannah is not just sewing clothes for her little boy, she is sewing priestly garments for him. Can’t you just hear Hannah speaking to Samuel about the dignity and duties of the Levitical priests? Can’t you see her instructing him about the high calling of his task and what the priestly garments are intended to convey? I believe Hannah has a tremendous impact on her son by the things she sews, and no doubt by what she says. How can such an act as sewing have spiritual impact? One should ask Hannah, or better yet, ask Samuel.

Eli's Feeble Rebuke

(2:22-25)

22 Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 23 And he said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? 24 "No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD'S people circulating. 25 "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death.

We learned in verses 12-17 of the sin of the priests in regard to the meat they offered as a sacrifice to God. Now, in verses 22-25, we are told of their immorality with the women who serve at the entrance of the tent. These seem to be the **"women"** referred to in Exodus:

8 Moreover, he made the laver of bronze with its base of bronze, from the mirrors of the serving women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting (Exodus 38:8).

Hophni and Phinehas are guilty of sexual immorality, and we know that Phinehas at least is a married man (see 1 Samuel 4:19). This is the sin of adultery and punishable by death. It is an even greater sin in the light of who commits it and where it is done. Consider the wickedness of Eli's sons in the light of God's promise to the Levitical priests:

42 "It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations *at the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there.* 43 "And I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. 44 "And I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. 45 "And I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. 46 "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God (Exodus 29:42-46, emphasis mine).

The doorway of the tent of meeting is the place where God meets with the Levitical priests, the place where God reveals His glory. There Aaron and his sons are consecrated, set apart, for their priestly service. And now, not that many years later, this becomes a very different kind of meeting place, a place where Eli's sons rendezvous with the women with whom they commit sexual immorality.

I refer to this passage as “Eli’s rebuke,” but we are never really told that he rebukes his sons. Eli certainly does nothing to restrain his sons or to hinder them in their sinful conduct. Eli’s words have no impact on his wayward sons. Even worse, Eli’s words are self-condemning. He seems to want to cause his sons to feel guilty, which obviously does not work. Eli’s words do, however, underscore Eli’s guilt. The author tells us that Eli **“heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel.”** It is not out of ignorance that Eli fails to act more decisively. He knows *everything* they are doing, and he also knows they are doing it high-handedly, to *all Israel*. Their sins are not momentary lapses in character or conduct; they are a habitual pattern of conduct, a lifestyle.

Isn’t it interesting that while Eli expresses his strong disapproval of their sexual immorality, there is no mention (at least in our text) of their sins regarding the sacrificial meats? The reason, as we shall later suggest, may well be indicated in verses 27-29. To top matters off, Eli’s words to his sons reveal that he understands the gravity of his sons’ sins. Their sins are not sins against man, but sins against God. These are presumptuous sins, sins for which there is no provision. These sons of Belial shake their fists in God’s face; they know it (if for no other reason, because Eli has just told them), and Eli knows it. Yet, in spite of all Eli knows, he does not follow through to the point of actually doing anything about it. I love Dale Ralph Davis’ comments on this portion of the text:

“Eli had rebuked his sons for their moral offenses (vv. 22-25); perhaps – though we can’t tell from verses 23-25 – he also reproved them for their liturgical offenses (vv. 13-17). In any case, he had taken no action to expel Hophni and Phinehas from the priestly office. Eli might protest, but his sons suffered no unemployment. There was no church discipline.”⁴

“Hence the man of God [the prophet of verses 27-36] rebukes the sin of sweet reasonableness, the willingness to tolerate sin, to allow God’s honour to take a back seat, to prefer ‘my boys’ to ‘my God.’ For Eli, blood was thicker than fidelity.”⁵

“How easy it is to practice a gutless compassion that never wants to offend anyone, that equates niceness with love and thereby ignores God’s law and essentially despises his holiness. We do not necessarily seek God’s honor when we spare human feelings.”⁶

Another Contrast With Samuel

(2:26)

26 Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favour both with the LORD and with men.

How desperately sinful the priesthood has become. Godly saints like Elkanah and Hannah must grit their teeth as they seek to worship God at Shiloh. Things seem to go from bad to worse. Eli is old and nearing death. His two sons are next in line. The righteous surely shudder at the thought. And yet, in this dark day for Israel, a little boy is growing up. Eli's sons are doomed in God's sight; He has purposed to put them to death (verse 25). They are not highly esteemed by the godly. Then there is Samuel. This young lad finds favour with both God and man -- if men only knew what the future of this lad held for them and their nation. In some of the darkest of days of Israel's history, when everything seems to be falling apart, God raises up the one whom He purposes to use to serve Him faithfully and to serve men as well. Such a one is Samuel. Eli's sons are on their way out; Samuel is on his way up.

This verse sounds strangely familiar, doesn't it? We know that Luke uses very similar words in reference to Jesus of Nazareth, as He is growing up:

52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men (Luke 2:52).

Why such similar words? Why does Luke choose to employ the same description as the author of 1 Samuel to speak of Samuel's development as a child? The days in which our Lord was born were also very dark days in Israel's history. The religious system had departed from the Word of God, just as in Samuel's day. And yet, while things looked very bleak for Israel, a young Lad was growing up, virtually unknown and unnoticed by the nation. This Child was the Messiah. He would save His people from their sins. He would someday sit on the throne of His father, David. And He, like Samuel His prototype, would exercise priesthood in a way that would deliver the people of God from their sins.

The "House Call" of an Unidentified Man of God

(2:27-36)

27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house? 28 'And did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel? 29 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded *in My dwelling*, and honour your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?' 30 "Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the

house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the LORD declares,' Far be it from Me-- for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. 31 'Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house. 32 'And you will see the distress of *My dwelling*, in *spite of* all that I do good for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. 33 'Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar that your eyes may fail *from weeping* and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life. 34 'And this will be the sign to you which shall come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them shall die. 35 'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always. 36 'And it shall come about that everyone who is left in your house shall come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and say, "Please assign me to one of the priest's offices so that I may eat a piece of bread."'

With few exceptions, the expression **“man of God”** is employed to refer to a prophet. In the days when **“the word of the Lord was rare”** (1 Samuel 3:1), it was quite an occasion for a prophet to speak directly to men for God. In our text, an unnamed prophet comes out of nowhere to rebuke Eli for his failure – indeed, his refusal – to deal decisively with his sons. In verses 27-29, the prophet puts the priesthood into its proper historical and theological perspective. He looks back into the past, to the time when the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood was established at the exodus. He then, in verses 30-34, looks into the future, prophesying concerning the penalty God will bring upon Eli and his house. In verses 35 and 36, he then looks forward to the nearer and more distant future, to that time when God will build a new house of priests. Let us consider these three elements of the message of this unnamed prophet.

I have threatened to someday write a work entitled, “Biblical Thinking.” The Scriptures employ various lines of thinking; one is what I call “original thinking.” Original thinking is that reasoning which goes back to the origin of the matter and reasons forward. For example, when Jesus is tested by the Pharisees on the matter of divorce, they ask Him, **“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?”** (Matthew 19:3). Some thought that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. Others were more selective. But all of those present on that day are shocked by how firm a stand our Lord takes. I wish to point out the way Jesus reasoned:

4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read, that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, ‘FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? 6 “Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).

The Pharisees reason out of the context of their own culture, their own day and time, their own values. Jesus challenges them to think through the matter of divorce on the basis of “original thinking.” In the beginning, when God created the world and mankind, He also created the institution of marriage. “How,” Jesus asks His opponents, “was marriage meant to work originally? What did God intend for marriage to be when He first created it?” God meant for a man and a woman to be joined together and never to be separated, except by death. “Can a man divorce His wife *for any reason at all?*” Jesus’ answer forces us to conclude, by original thinking, “God did not intend for a man to ever divorce his wife, *for any reason at all.*”

Through this unnamed prophet, God challenges Eli (and the reader) to do some original thinking. Eli’s problems, and those of his sons, are problems with the priesthood. The solution to these problem is a new priest (Samuel) and a new house (or dynasty) of priests. “So,” the prophet challenges his readers, “just how was it originally with respect to the priesthood?” The Levitical priesthood came into being while the Israelites were still in bondage in Egypt. It is there that God designates Aaron as a priest.

It is there that Aaron’s priestly “**house**” is established. The word “**house**” is repeated often here for good reason. God does not just appoint Aaron as a priest, but his sons and their sons, Aaron’s “**house.**” How can Eli be fully aware of the sins his sons commit as priests and not be concerned enough to deal adequately with his “**house**? The priesthood is not just an individual matter, but a “**house**” matter, and yet Eli’s “**house**” is crumbling, and he does almost nothing to stop it. In the Law of Moses, priesthood is a “**house**” matter, involving all members of one’s household (see Leviticus 21:1-9). God created a “**house**” for Aaron and his descendants, and Eli is a part of this house. He desperately needs to tend to his “**house.**”

Personal pronouns abound in verses 27-29, and most of them refer to God. Three times in verses 27 and 28 God says through His prophet, “**Did I not . . . ?**”. God reveals Himself to Aaron. God chooses Aaron and appoints his house to serve Him as priests. God gives the priests their “**portion**” of the sacrifices to sustain them in their ministry. Original thinking requires one to conclude that

the priesthood is “of God” in that God created it, established it, and set down the rules and regulations governing it. Consequently, God speaks of “**My sacrifice,**” “**My offering,**” “**My dwelling,**” “**My people,**” and, by inference, “My honour,” the honour due Him by the priests because of all He has done regarding their priesthood.

This is where Eli goes wrong. Eli honors his sons more than he honors God (verse 29). He appears to be afraid to confront his sons and deal with them decisively, because they might dislike him or even despise him. Being the kind of sons they are, they might even kill him. Eli is more afraid of his sons than of his God. He wants his sons’ approval and affection more than he wants God’s approval and affection.. How can this be? Verse 29 suggests why Eli is so silent and passive regarding his sons’ sins. God says, “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded *in My dwelling*, and honour your sons above Me, *by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering* of My people Israel?” (verse 29).

Our text tells us that Eli heard of “**all**” that his sons were doing to all Israel. Eli therefore knows of the way his sons are getting their meat. He knows about his sons’ immorality. In our text, Eli rebukes his sons for their sexual immorality, but nothing is said about their meat acquisitions. Eli may be old and his senses dull, but I believe he knows the difference between grilled and boiled meat. I am convinced he knows the difference between a chuck roast and tenderloin. Eli may keep quiet about the sin of his sons in obtaining meat because he eats some of the meat himself. He personally benefits from the sins of his sons, and rather than being aggressive toward these sins, he is passive. God reminds Eli that all of the benefits and blessings of his priesthood come from Him -- not his sons. Therefore, Eli will do well to honour God above his sons rather than continue to honour his sons (the sons of Belial) above God by not disciplining them for their sin. Eli rebukes Hannah because he wrongly thinks she is drunk, but he cannot find it in himself to rebuke his own sons for the way they obtain their meat. Eli is reluctant to terminate the very system which sustains him, the system which makes him fat.

Eli’s sin is exposed and explained. The blessings of the priesthood come from God. God is the one whom Eli must honour. Eli’s sons must be rebuked. But because of the “perks” Eli enjoys for the sins of his sons -- and what he fears he will lose -- Eli refuses to deal with the sin of his sons as he should. God’s judgment therefore comes not only upon Eli, but upon his “**house,**” a judgment spelled out in verses 30-34:

30 “Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, ‘I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever’;

but now the LORD declares, ‘Far be it from Me-- for those who honor Me I will honour, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.’” (1 Samuel 2:30).

Is God about to break His promise? No, not at all. We must first remember that God’s promise is a covenant Eli and his sons break by virtue of their sins. In this sense, God keeps His covenant. It is important to see from this text that God does not take the priesthood entirely away from Eli’s house. God says that some of his **“house”** will die. Specifically, Hophni and Phinehas will die, on the same day (verse 34). But God does not cut off every one of Eli’s descendants:

33 “Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar that your eyes may fail *from weeping* and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life” (verse :33)

Have Eli and his sons “made themselves fat” with the sacrifices? Have they been eating only the prime cuts? That will change:

“And it shall come about that everyone who is left in your house shall come and bow down to him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and say, “Please assign me to one of the priest’s offices so that I may eat a piece of bread.”” (verse 36).

God will impoverish Eli’s **“house,”** but they will still serve as priests. God will take away their **“strength”** and make them **“weak”** (verse 31). It will not be a pretty sight, but all will see that God will not indefinitely allow His priesthood to be defiled.

Verses 30-34 describe the judgment God is about to bring upon Eli and his sons, Eli’s **“house.”**

Verses 35 and 36 speak of the blessing God will bring about for Israel through the raising up of a **“faithful priest”** and an **“enduring house”** of priests (verse 35). If Eli’s **“house”** is to receive any blessings, it will be only by their submission to this **“faithful priest”** (verse 36).

This raises two questions: who is this **“faithful priest,”** and what is this **“enduring house”** of priests? The words of verse 35 sound similar to those in 2 Samuel 7, known by some as the “Davidic Covenant:”

10 “I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, 11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that *the LORD will*

make a house for you. 12 “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, *I will raise up your descendant after you*, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 “He shall build a house for My name, and *I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.* 14 “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took *it* away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 “And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” “ 17 In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David (2 Samuel 7:10-17, emphasis mine).

The “**house**” of Eli is something like the “house” of King Saul, except that while Eli’s house continues in decline, Saul’s house ends in regard to kingship. But while Eli’s descendants will still serve as priests, they will do so in subjection to a better priest. Who is this better priest? And why is God making a covenant that this one will have an “**enduring house**”?

The answer is two-fold. I believe there is a nearer fulfilment and a more distant, eternal fulfilment to this priesthood covenant which God makes in our text. *First*, God will provide His people with a better “**house**” of priests than Eli and sons, and this will take place in Israel’s not too distant future (from Eli’s perspective). The Levitical priesthood is given through the line of Aaron, a descendant of Levi (see Exodus 2:1ff.). When Aaron is made the high priest, his two sons, Nadab and Abihu serve under him. When they are killed because of the “**strange fire**” they offer, Aaron’s other two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, are appointed in the place of their brothers (Leviticus 10). The priestly line of Aaron then descends through these two surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar. Originally, the high priest descends from Eleazar, but Eli, who serves as the high priest, is a descendant of Ithamar. The prophecy of this unnamed prophet seems to be initially fulfilled when Samuel becomes priest in Eli’s place; then later on, in the reign of David, Zadoc, a descendant of Eleazar, will be made high priest (1 Kings 1:7-8; 1 Chronicles 16:4-40). In the Millennial Kingdom, the “sons of Zadoc” will serve as priests (Ezekiel 44:15; 48:11).

Second, I believe the ultimate fulfilment to this prophecy is our Lord Jesus Christ, just as the ultimate fulfilment of our Lord’s covenant with David is the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel’s history shows that no merely human king of Israel is worthy of an eternal kingdom, of an endless reign. *No one is worthy -- not David, nor Solomon, nor anyone except the “King of the Jews,” our Lord Jesus Christ, who came to “sit on the throne of His father, David.”* He is the full and final fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant. Just so, our Lord is the full and final fulfilment of the priestly covenant of our text. There was never a priest in

Israel's history worthy to serve as priest eternally -- certainly not Eli, and just as certainly -- not Samuel. While God is about to give Israel better priests than Eli and his sons, *He is, in a future day, going to give His people a perfect priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the perfect and ultimate prophet, priest, and king.*

Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, our text has much to do with the matter of raising children. More precisely, our text addresses the way a parent deals with adult children who are in rebellion and disobedience to God. It seems safe to say that many of the problems Eli handled badly with his grown sons are the result of his failure to deal with them rightly as children. Yet, it is entirely possible that children raised in a very godly home can turn out the way Eli's sons do. The point of our text is that Eli fails to deal with his sons properly *as the high priest, and as a judge over the nation Israel*. Eli should have dealt with his sons the same way he dealt with any men who were priests who were sexually immoral, who dishonoured God, who profaned the priesthood, and who failed to respond to verbal correction. Eli fails to deal rightly with his sons is because they are his sons, and he allows this one fact to outweigh all others. Let us first review how Eli fails in dealing with his sons.

(1) Eli fails to instruct his sons in the Law of the Lord, especially in the ways of the priests.

(2) Eli seems “blind” to the sins going on under his very nose – sins he must be hearing about from many Israelites.

Those sins which take place occur in the very places Eli should and most likely would have been in his priestly ministry. It is almost inconceivable that he could not have seen them. Yet I must say that I watch parents all the time whose children act inappropriately right in front of their parents, and they never seem to see them. I fear we are all tempted to turn a blind eye to those things which we simply do not want to address. Eli is virtually blind, but he certainly is not deaf. He cannot fail to know what was going on, unless of course, he really does not want to know.

(3) Eli waits far too long to respond in a corrective manner toward the sins of his sons.

Even after all Israel tells Eli about the sins of his sons, he does not act quickly enough. A feeble word of disapproval and warning is too little and too late. One gets the distinct impression that the sins which became the normal practice of his sons are those which were evident at a much earlier point in time when they

might have been “nipped in the bud.” *Parenthood and procrastination do not mix.*

(4) Eli does not do everything in his means to correct his sons -- or at least to resist their sinful conduct.

It is one thing for Eli not to know what his sons are doing. It might at least be understandable if he is unaware of how serious his sons’ sins are. But from his own words, we know that Eli fully knows just how serious the sins of his sons are. Eli knows his sons’ actions are sinful, and that they are sins against God. Yet when his sons reject his verbal rebuke, he simply gives up without employing other means at his disposal. He should have, and he could have, stoned his sons. He could have removed his sons from the priesthood. But he does nothing to stop them after they reject his words of rebuke.

I see parents wringing their hands today, much like Eli, when their children refuse to obey. Their children are not 6’ 5”, weighing 250 pounds, and all muscle. Their children are often five years old, and the options the parents have are many. Yet, after one word of instruction, when the child blatantly refuses to obey, the parent shrugs his or her shoulders as if to say, “What else can I do?” Do I really need to tell you? Read Proverbs; you will think of something.

(5) Eli does not want to do what he has the power to do with respect to his sons -- because he does not want to pay the personal price for doing so.

Let’s admit it. When you and I fail to discipline our children, it is not because we have no action we can take; it is not because we do not know what we should do. It is because we are not willing to pay the price for doing what is right -- for doing what is best for our child and for us. Eli may fear losing what little relationship he has with his sons. He may be afraid of losing respect for taking public action. He may well be afraid that he will have to go back to the kind of meat he doesn’t really prefer. Eli is afraid to discipline his sons because he desperately wants what they are giving him, and he does not want to lose it.

(6) Eli does not deal rightly with his children, even when he is warned and instructed by God directly through prophetic revelations, and even when he is fully aware of the consequences for failing to repent and obey God in relation to his sons.

Eli can never claim ignorance. He knows what his sons are guilty of doing. He would twice be rebuked by a prophet of God (the unnamed prophet of chapter 2 and Samuel in chapter 3). Eli does not even do the right thing when God directly calls his disobedience to his attention.

(7) Eli honours his sons more highly than his God.

This is the bottom line, as God sees it. Eli is more concerned about his relationship with his sons than his relationship with his God. Our Lord Jesus made the matter of relationships crystal clear:

34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 “For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN’S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. 37 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 “He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:34-39).

Our text comes “close to home” in several regards. We may think that the conduct of Eli and his sons as priests has little to do with us as contemporary Christians. We must be reminded that we too are priests:

5 You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

We should also be reminded that while Eli and his sons (and Samuel) minister in the **“temple of God”** (1 Samuel 3:3), the **“dwelling place of God”** (1 Samuel 2:29), we are **“the temple of God,”** His **“dwelling place,”** and when we do harm to His **“dwelling place,”** God takes it most seriously:

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

No wonder the conduct of the Christians at Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 5 and 6), and especially their conduct in the church (see 1 Corinthians 11:17ff.), is taken so seriously by God.

We, like Eli, must bring our children up in the “**discipline and instruction of the Lord**” (Ephesians 6:4). *We must not only verbally instruct and rebuke our children, we must correct them.* This includes the use of the “**rod**” of Proverbs. It is no sanction for excess and abuse, and abuse by some is no excuse for avoiding spanking a disobedient child, when the rod is the most effective means of correction. *All too many parents are controlled by their children, rather than keeping their children under control. And even when the time comes when our children are grown, we are still responsible to deal with their sins biblically.*

For us as parents, the starting point is to give our children up. Our Lord says we must take up our cross, that we must die to self, that we must give up our lives to gain them. We must do the same with our children. I am beginning to see why the great test of Abraham’s faith was being willing to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22). I see why stubborn Jacob, who did not wish to lose his son, Joseph, and who refused to lose his son, Benjamin, had to give him them up in order to be “saved” from the famine (see Genesis 37-45). We must do the same. *We must not find our life in our children, but in our God, and specifically in our Savior, Jesus Christ.* Compared to our love for God, we must “hate” our children. And in so doing, we will be free to deal with them in a way which is for their best and our best, to the glory of God.

There are times when a child may have to discipline his or her parents. As a church, we have had the unhappy experience of exercising church discipline on a wilful sinner (see Matthew 18:15-20). When the one who is under church discipline is a parent, this has implications and obligations for the children, especially the older children. It is not one bit easier for a child to correct a parent than for a parent to correct a child. But when we are aware of the sin -- and of the Scriptures which prescribe our response to the sin -- we are obliged to act. If we refuse, like Eli, then our failure to correct is itself sin.

This discipline of which we speak applies within the larger church “family.” When a “**brother**” sins (see Matthew 18:15), it is our obligation to rebuke him, with a view to his repentance. All too many Christians choose, like Eli, to turn a blind eye and hope the problem will go away. It will not go away; it will only get bigger. Our culpability only grows with the time we allow to pass without acting in obedience to God’s Word.

May God grant us the grace to learn from Eli and his sons, rather than to learn like them. Thank God that He who commands us to instruct and correct our children has set the example for us in the way He deals with us as His children. Let us thank God that He who requires us to raise up our children in a godly way is the One who gives us the grace to do so. To God be the glory!

The Call of Samuel

(3:1-14)

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. 2 And it happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim *and* he could not see well), 3 and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God *was*, 4 that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, lie down again.” So he went and lay down. 6 And the LORD called yet again, “Samuel!” So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he answered, “I did not call, my son, lie down again.” 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. 8 So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 And Eli said to Samuel, “Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Thy servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10 Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for Thy servant is listening.” 11 And the LORD said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 “In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 “For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. 14 “And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”

Samuel is referred to in verse 1 as a **“boy,”** a term flexible enough to use with reference to a newborn infant or to a young man.” Here in our text, I understand it to refer to Samuel as a young man, 12 years of age or so. It seems several years have passed since the end of chapter 2 and that chapter 3 picks up in Samuel’s teen years.

The writer informs us that, **“word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent”** (verse 1). Men were not listening to God in those days, and God did not speak very often. This “silence” is often a form of divine judgment, and if not broken, would prove to be Israel’s undoing (see 1 Samuel 28; Psalm 74:9; Isaiah 29:9-14; Micah 3:6-7; also Proverbs 29:18). We are told

that prophecy was rare, so that we see the calling of Samuel as an end to God's silence (see 1 Samuel 3:19-21).

The details provided for us in verses 2, 3, and 7 help us understand the setting in which the events of chapter 3 take place. Samuel is lying down in his appointed place inside the tabernacle, not that far from the Ark of the Covenant, which is inside the Holy of Holies. Eli is sleeping somewhere else, not too distant for Samuel to hear when he calls. As the author informs us, Eli's eyesight has greatly deteriorated, so that his vision is seriously impaired (see also 4:15). With Eli's age, weight, and visual limitations, he needs the help of a boy like Samuel. Samuel can bring Eli a drink of water or run other errands for him. It is only natural for Samuel to assume that a call late at night comes from his master, Eli.

From the writer's statement in verse 3, we know that the call of Samuel comes in the early hours of the morning, for he says that **"the lamp of God had not yet gone out."** The lamp is the golden lampstand, with its seven lamps which are to **"burn continually"** (Exodus 27:20-21; Leviticus 24:2). This does not mean they are to burn 24 hours a day, but that they are always to burn at night. This becomes clear from the words of 2 Chronicles 13:11:

11 "And every morning and evening they burn to the LORD burnt offerings and fragrant incense, and the showbread is *set* on the clean table, and the golden lampstand with its lamps is *ready* to light every evening; for we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him."

There is no need for a lamp to burn in the daytime, but during the day oil is prepared so that the lamps can be lit before dark. They will burn through the night and burn out at daybreak. Since the lamp of God has not yet gone out, we know it is still dark, in the early morning hours, that God calls to Samuel.

Like Eli's sons, Samuel does not know the Lord (compare 1 Samuel 2:12 and 3:7). The difference between Samuel and the sons of Belial is that Samuel does not *yet* know the Lord. It is obvious that Eli's sons did not know God, and never would. It is important to see, however, that Samuel is not saved at the time of his calling. He, like Saul (Paul) in the New Testament (see Acts 9), is saved and called sometime during his encounter with God."

The first two times Samuel is called by God, the young lad assumes he is hearing the voice of Eli, his master. It makes sense, especially if Eli sometimes calls to Samuel for assistance during the night. It is not until the third "call" that Eli finally grasps the situation and realizes that God is calling Samuel to reveal His Word to the boy. At his instructions, Samuel responds to God when He once again calls. A portion of that first revelation (if not all of it) is recorded in verses 11-14.

God announces to Samuel that what He is about to do will cause the ears of those who hear the news of it to tingle, both ears!² This is no exaggeration. When Eli hears, he collapses, resulting in his death (see 4:18). The message seems to be a personal one addressed to Eli. It is somewhat like the prophecy God reveals to Eli in 2:27-36, except that the prophet is identified. In fact, the prophet will be Eli's replacement, functioning as a prophet, a priest, and a judge. The prophecy of chapter 2 is more distant, having apparently been delivered several years before Israel's defeat by the Philistines as described in chapter 4. The prophecy given to Eli through Samuel seems to speak of the defeat of Israel and the death of Eli's sons as an imminent event.

The message given to Samuel focuses on Eli's sin more than on the sins of his sons. More specifically, God indicates that He is bringing about judgment on Eli and his house because Eli knows of the sins of his sons and does nothing to hinder them. In contemporary terms, Eli is an "enabler." He facilitates his sons' sinful behaviour rather than resist and oppose it.

I am disappointed in the translation of verse 13 in the NASB:

13 "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them."

It certainly appears that Eli actually does verbally rebuke his sons as we read in 2:22-25. While the word "rebuke" is absent, this is the sense of his words. I do not believe God judges Eli for failing to rebuke his sons, but for failing to go beyond mere verbal rebuke when they refuse to listen to him.

The context certainly raises questions with the word "**rebuke**" in 3:13, and a concordance study shows these questions have much merit. The term used here is an interesting one. The term is never translated "**rebuke**" elsewhere in the Old Testament (in the NASB) and should not have been rendered this way here. Interestingly, it is the same word found in verse 2 of the same chapter (3) in reference to Eli's failing eyesight. It is used of the eyesight of Moses, which is good (Deuteronomy 34:7), and of the poor eyesight of Isaac (Genesis 27:1) and Job (17:7). It has the normal sense of growing weak, dim, or faint. It is the term used in Isaiah 42:3 and 4 for the *dimly burning* wick, which our Lord will not extinguish, and for the spirit of Messiah, which will not be *disheartened*.

How then did the translators come to render the term "**rebuke**"? I fear they were overly influenced by the rendering of the LXX (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament). The Septuagint (LXX) translators chose to render the Hebrew term in our text with the Greek term *nouthéo*, the word Jay Adams employs to characterize his method of counselling, which he calls *nouthetic*

counseling. *Noutheo* does mean admonition or rebuke. This, however, does not seem to be the primary sense of the Hebrew term or the meaning required by the context.

I believe the best rendering is found in the King James Version, the New King James Version, the NIV (essentially), the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version and others, all of which employ the term “**restrain**.” In our text, it looks like the author is making a play on words. Eli’s eyes are dim; they can barely see. Eli does not take a dim enough view of his son’s actions. Using the analogy of light, his sons’ sins are on high beam. He may not be able to extinguish the “light” of their sins, but he can have a dimming effect. He can exercise some restraint -- for example, he can remove them as priests. He can make it difficult for them to sin. Instead, he facilitates their sins, and it is for this that God deals so severely with Eli and his entire house.

Verse 14 indicates that the sin of Eli’s house is now beyond repentance; God’s judgment is imminent. There is no sacrifice or atonement to set this matter straight, only judgment. In simple terms, Eli and sons have passed the “point of no return.” They refuse to repent, and judgment is coming. This is because Eli’s sin and the sins of his sons are committed with a “high hand;”¹³ they are sins of presumption.

Samuel’s Reticence and Eli’s Persistence:

The Prophecy is told 1 Samuel 3:15-18

15 So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, “Samuel, my son.” And he said, “Here I am.” 17 And he said, “What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you.” 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, “It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him.”

When morning comes, Samuel seems to avoid Eli. He goes about his regular routine, just as always, as though nothing has happened. Eli knows better. He knows that God has called Samuel three times during the night. He knows it is God who is about to reveal something to Samuel. He does not know what it is, although he surely has his fears. The last message he received from a prophet was a foreboding one. And so Eli presses Samuel to tell him all that God spoke to him. He does not allow Samuel to hold back. And so Samuel reluctantly tells Eli the whole message.

What is most disturbing, to me at least, is the response of Eli to the prophecy. Eli is informed that judgment is coming, and this time at least, it cannot be stopped.¹⁴ God's judgment cannot be avoided, but Eli can at least repent of his own sins of neglect. Instead, Eli speaks words which have a religious ring and appear to be an evidence of his submission to the sovereign will of God, but which are really an expression of Eli's willingness to continue on in his sin. What we read is not an expression of faith in God's sovereignty, but an expression of fatalism couched in religious terms.

Samuel's Accreditation as a Prophet of God

(3:19-21)

19 Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. 20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. 21 And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

I take it that the first encounter Samuel had with God is his conversion experience, as well as his call as a prophet. As mentioned earlier, this is much like Saul's experience on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9). The author now informs us that this encounter with God, and the resulting reception of a word from the LORD, is the first of many. Verse 21 tells us specifically of a second appearance of God to Samuel at Shiloh, and the inference is that others will follow. It is here, at the first appearance of God to Samuel, that he not only seems to become a believer (in the wording of the author, he came to know the LORD),¹⁵ but he also becomes a prophet. Soon, he will become a priest and a judge as well.

The way a true prophet is accredited is spelled out in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:14-22. A true prophet speaks in a way that calls upon men to follow God, to obey Him. Furthermore, a true prophet is one whose words come to pass. Our author tells us literally that God let none of Samuel's **words "fall to the ground"** (verse 19). Everything Samuel says will happen does happen. And every Israelite realizes that God's hand is upon Samuel and that He speaks the Word of the LORD. From Dan, the northern-most part of the land, to Beersheba, the southern-most city, all Israel recognizes Samuel as a prophet of God. The silence is broken.

The Defeat of Israel, and the Death of Eli's Sons

(4:1-11)

1 Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped in Aphek. 2 And the Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield. 3 When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the LORD, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies." 4 So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts who sits *above* the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 And it happened as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, that all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth resounded. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What *does* the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews *mean*?" Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. 7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. 8 "Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all *kinds of* plagues in the wilderness. 9 "Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you; therefore, be men and fight." 10 So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent, and the slaughter was very great; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

The Israelites have been dominated by the Philistines for some time so that the Philistines look upon them as their slaves (4:9). For some reason, battle breaks out between the Philistines and the Israelites, and the Israelites are badly beaten. When the dust settles, it is learned that 4,000 Israelites have died (verse 2). When the Israelites return to camp, they cannot understand how God would allow them to suffer this defeat.

Without fasting and prayer, without consulting God, the Israelites decide to practice what Dale Ralph Davis calls "Rabbit-Foot Theology."⁸ The Ark is not viewed as a symbol of God's presence, but as a magic lamp, which they but need to rub rightly to summon God to their aid. The Ark is a good luck charm, so that wherever they take it, they will be blessed. "Of course," they reason, "we didn't take the Ark along with us! We'll take the Ark when we go to battle

tomorrow, and we're certain to win. God is sure to be with us because His Ark is with us."

The plan backfires miserably. At first, it does not appear so, but in retrospect it is a huge disaster from the perspective of those who thought the Ark would assure them victory. When the Ark is brought out of the tent and into its place before the Israelite soldiers, a great shout resounds from the Israelite camp. It becomes like a huge pep rally before a football game. The Israelite warriors are really pumped. They cannot lose. God is going to be with them.

The Philistine soldiers hear the uproar coming from the Israelite camp and wonder what could cause such a triumphant shout from the Israelite camp. Then they learn that the Ark has been brought out into the camp of the Israelites. They, like the Israelites, look upon the Ark as though it is capable of magic. They recall that when God led the Israelites against the Egyptians, they were defeated. They remember the stories of the victories God gave the Israelites over their enemies, and that whenever the Israelites fought their enemies, they took the Ark with them. They now fear that the presence of the Ark before the Israelite armies assures Israel of a victory. They might die, the Philistines conclude, but at least they can die like men. And so, rather than give up, the Philistines become motivated to fight to the death, and to die like heroes. This results in the Philistines being even more motivated to fight than the Israelites, and the Philistines once again defeat the Israelites -- only this time 30,000 Israelites are slain. Among the dead are Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, who are slain as the Ark of God is captured as a trophy of war.

The Israelites foolishly conclude that taking the Ark of God to war is their guarantee of success in battle. In the plan of God, the Israelites taking the Ark into battle is the means God ordained of fulfilling the words of prophecy He had spoken through the unnamed prophet. Hophni and Phinehas accompany the Ark to war, and when the Israelites suffer defeat and the Ark is taken, the two sons of Eli die on the same day (see 2:34).

The Death of Eli and His Daughter-in-Law

(4:12-22)

The Word of the LORD is fulfilled, in part, but there is more divine judgment to come on this day of infamy. Eli is stationed by the road in his seat, trembling in heart as he eagerly waits for news of the battle. He must sense that this is the day of judgment. The Ark of God is gone from Shiloh, as are his two sons, and Eli is not at all comfortable. A certain Benjamite escapes death and flees back to Shiloh from the battle scene with his clothes torn and dust on his head. It is a sign of mourning and defeat, which Eli is not able to see because his vision is all

but gone. The rest of the city begins to cry out as word of their defeat quickly circulates.

Eli can hear even if he cannot see, and what he hears frightens him. His ears, as it were, are about to tingle (see 3:11). Eli asks what the commotion means, and the man who has escaped hastens to his side where he briefly sums up his report. There is no “good news” and “bad news” but only “bad news” -- Israel has been defeated by the Philistines, Eli’s sons have been killed, and the Ark of God has been taken. The news is more than Eli’s 98-year-old body can handle. He collapses, falling from his seat in such a way that he breaks his neck. Eli is dead, along with his sons, and all on the same day. His forty years of service as judge over Israel has ended.

The dying is not yet over for the house of Eli. The wife of Eli’s son, Phinehas, is pregnant, and the news of Israel’s tragic defeat, the loss of the Ark, and the deaths of Eli and her husband bring on her labour. As she is in labor, things do not go well. While those helping try to comfort her, she refuses their help. When she learns that her child is a boy, she names him Ichabod, a name meaning “no glory,” because the Ark of God has been taken and her husband and father-in-law have died. This daughter-in-law of Eli seems more perceptive than her husband. She realizes that the greatest disaster is the loss of the Ark. In her mind, the capture of the Ark is the departure of God’s glory.

Actually, I think she was wrong. As I understand the Old Testament, the glory had long since departed from the tabernacle. Consider these words in Exodus, which describe the coming of God’s glory to the tabernacle:

34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 36 And throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; 37 but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. 38 For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel (Exodus 40:34-38).

God promised He would meet with the Levitical priests there at the entrance of the tabernacle:

42 “It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. 43 “And I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. 44 “And I will consecrate

the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. 45 “And I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. 46 “And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God” (Exodus 29:42-46).

Somewhere along the line, the glory of God departs from the tabernacle. This departure appears not to be as dramatic and apparent as the coming of God’s glory to the tabernacle, as described above. Samuel lives in the tabernacle. He sleeps but a few feet away from the Ark of God (3:3), yet he has not yet come to know God and seems to have no special sense of the presence of God there. God’s appearance to Samuel in the tabernacle is described as something special, something unusual. God comes there and stands, calling Samuel (3:10) in a way that is not at all typical. Samuel does not recognize that it is the LORD; he has to be told who it is by Eli. Even Eli is not quick to discern the LORD’s appearance.

The Ark is not the manifestation of God to Israel there in the tabernacle. It is no idol. It is a symbol of God’s presence with His people. While the symbol remains in the possession of the priests there in Shiloh, the glory of God has long since departed. The capture of the Ark only symbolizes what is already true, what has been true for a long time. It is certain that the glory has departed from Shiloh, but God’s glory will never be hidden by sinful men, as our next lesson in this series will show.

Conclusion

As we come to the tragic ending of an era in Israel’s distant past (of Eli’s 40-year service as judge and priest), let us pause to reflect on the lessons this text has for us as Christians today.

First, let us consider what our text teaches us about God. How gracious God is to His people Israel, especially when they are sinful and undeserving. Graciously, God repeatedly warns Eli of the judgment which is coming upon His house. The years that pass between the first warning and the fulfilment of God’s promised judgment are a time when Eli could repent and act properly in response to the sins of his sons. God is gracious in breaking the silence and again revealing Himself and His Word to the nation through the prophet, Samuel.

God is gracious, and He is also sovereign (a grace that is unmerited must, of necessity, be sovereignly bestowed). Samuel does not know God, nor does he even recognize His voice. Samuel is not seeking God, and yet God appears to him, causing him to know Him, and calling him to be a prophet. God accredits Samuel before the nation, so that all Israel knows there is now a true prophet of

God. God sovereignly prepares the way for the removal of Eli and his sons by raising up young Samuel, calling and gifting him to be a prophet.

God hates sin, and He judges sinners who will not repent. These are dark days for the nation Israel. The priesthood is corrupt. Those who are to serve God and the nation are abusing their office and abusing the people. The priests are thieves and robbers. They are corrupt and immoral. God's Word clearly indicates the sacredness of this office and ministry and reveals the ways in which priests should reflect and respect the holiness of God. Eli's sons shake their fists in God's face, and finally their day of judgment comes, precisely as God has said. *God's day of judgment may come later than we expect, but it will most certainly come.*

God seldom works in ways we expect or predict so that we may marvel at His wisdom and power in accomplishing His will and His Word. Who would have thought that the judgment of God would be brought to pass through the enemies of God and of His people, the Philistines? By presumptuously taking the Ark to battle with them, the Israelites show their lack of reverence for the holiness of God, and by taking the Ark to war, the death of Eli's sons on the same day is accomplished. God works in strange and wonderful ways.

Second, let us consider what this passage teaches us about men.

Just as God does not change, and thus He is the same **“yesterday, today, and forever,”** so men do not really change either. We are not called to be prophets as Samuel was so long ago, but our calling is not all that different from his. Just as he was not seeking God, and God sought him out, so lost men are not seeking God today (see Romans 3:10-11). Men are saved, not because they are seeking God, but because God is seeking and saving lost sinners. *It is His finding us more than our finding Him. It is His sovereign grace which draws us to Himself. Salvation, praise God, is of the LORD, and it is He and He alone who is worthy of our praise.*

My point is that God calls men today just as He called Samuel so long ago -- and for essentially the same reasons. He has revealed His Word to us, not by a personal appearance or vision, but through His Holy Word, the Bible. Our purpose, like Samuel's, is to declare God's Word to men. *Every Christian is “called” to faith in Christ and “called” as well to proclaim the Word of Christ to men.*

We are not like the Israelites of Samuel's day, who can say that **“a word from the LORD is rare.”** *The truth is that God has spoken to us finally and fully in the person of His Son and in the Scriptures we hold in our hands* (see Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-4). The problem today is not that God has not spoken, but that men

are not listening. No wonder we find the expression repeated in the New Testament, **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”** (see Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Would that each of us could say in sincerity, **“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”** This is the spirit of the one who will **“hear”** the Word of the Lord.

As I consider our text, I see *three* responses to God which are typical of the responses men have to God today. The *first* is the response of the Israelites. The Israelites want God in their midst, to “be there for them” in their hour of need, to do the things they wish Him to do. They take the Ark of God to battle with them, expecting God to give them victory. Rather than seeing themselves as God’s servants, God is their servant. Theirs is a “god” to use, not a God to honor and glorify and praise and worship and obey. This is the “rabbit-foot theology” Davis speaks of which is so popular today. If we but do the right things, go through the right steps, then God is obliged to do our bidding. *It is just not so.* God is not there to jump through our hoops. And those who foolishly suppose that He is are in for some serious trouble.

The *second* response to God is that of Eli. His response is one of fatalism, of resignation. At least twice God speaks to Eli through a prophet to warn him of the judgment coming upon him and his house because he does not deal with the sins of his sons. Eli does nothing beyond verbally rebuking his sons. Even now, when the death of his sons is around the corner, Eli does absolutely nothing. His response has an empty religious ring, **“It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him”** (3:18). It is simply a pious sounding version of “what will be, will be.” When David is rebuked for his sin with Bathsheba, he is informed that the child will die (2 Samuel 12:14). This does not keep David from doing anything about it. David beseeches the Lord, prostrating himself on the ground all night, praying that God might spare the child (2 Samuel 12:16-17). Eli seems to simply shrug his shoulders and say, “It is God’s will.”

Sadly, this fatalism is found in Christians today. Rather than finding the sovereignty of God a motivation to strive to please God, some use it as their excuse for doing nothing. In preaching this lesson, I defined a fatalist as “a tired Calvinist.” I later changed my mind and decided a fatalist is a “re-tired Calvinist.” A friend and fellow-elder, Don Grimm, called my attention to the crucial difference between a true Calvinist (one who believes God is in control, and finds this a proper basis for godly effort) and a fatalist. The Chaldeans of old were fatalists. They studied the heavens, believing that the relationship of the heavenly bodies determined what would happen on earth. Fatalists do not see the ultimate cause of earthly events as a sovereign, personal God, who desires fellowship with those who trust in Him. It is one’s relationship with God personally, through faith in Jesus Christ, that causes one to find God’s

sovereignty the reason to strive, rather than an excuse to sit. Eli's faith had deteriorated to little more than the thinking of a fatalist.

Finally, there is the response of Samuel. Samuel does not do anything to prompt God's appearance or to reveal His Word in prophecy. Samuel is simply going about his daily duties. There is nothing particularly romantic or "spiritual" about dusting and cleaning tabernacle furnishings, about sweeping the floors, or about serving a nearly blind, nearly dead old man (Eli). But in the course of going about his assigned tasks, God finds Samuel and reveals Himself to Him. Many people want to do something spectacular (like take an Ark along to battle) to obtain God's blessings and power. Samuel teaches us that this is not the norm. *Let us go about our lives, faithfully doing the work God has given us to do, leaving the spectacular interventions, the great successes, to God.* When it is His time for them to happen, they will happen, not so much because of what we have done, but because God always keeps His promises.



The Ark of the Covenant, and artist's impression

5-6. The ark among the Philistines and its return

Verses 5:1-5. The ark in Dagon's temple

5:6-621. The Lord's punishment of the Philistines

The Philistines and the God in the Hands of God

(5:1-12)

1 Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. 3 When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again. 4 But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands *were* cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. 5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

6 Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories. 7 When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god." 8 So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath." And they brought the ark of the God of Israel *around*. 9 And it came about that after they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. 10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it happened as the ark of God came to Ekron that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people." 11 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. 12 And the men who did not die were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Draggin' Dagon

(5:1-5)

From a merely human point of view, it looks as though God is being held hostage by the Philistines. From the perspective of the Israelites, the anguish of Eli, his dying daughter-in-law, and other Israelites at the capture of the Ark, is understandable. But Israel's God is not an idol; He does not need for men to carry Him about. God is the One who carries Israel:

18 To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? 19 *As for* the idol, a craftsman casts it, A goldsmith plates it with gold, And a silversmith *fashions* chains of silver. 20 He who is too impoverished for *such* an offering Selects a tree that does not rot; He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman To prepare an idol that will not totter. 21 Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. 23 He *it is* who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. 24 Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. 25 “To whom then will you liken Me That I should be *his* equal?” says the Holy One. 26 Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these *stars*, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of *His* power Not one *of them* is missing (Isaiah 40:18-26).

1 Bel has bowed down, Nebo stoops over; Their images are *consigned* to the beasts and the cattle. The things that you carry are burdensome, A load for the weary *beast*. 2 They stooped over, they have bowed down together; They could not rescue the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity. 3 “Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, You who have been borne by Me from birth, And have been carried from the womb; 4 Even to your old age, I shall be the same, And even to your graying years I shall bear *you!* I have done *it*, and I shall carry *you*; And I shall bear *you*, and I shall deliver *you*. 5 “To whom would you liken Me, And make Me equal and compare Me, That we should be alike? (Isaiah 46:1-5).

I can imagine the elation and jubilant celebration the Philistines momentarily enjoy over their apparent victory as they carry the Ark of God from Ebenezer to Ashdod, the northern most of their five principle cities. In their minds, defeating the Israelites and capturing the Ark was defeating God. It is probably with great ceremony that the Philistines carry the Ark of God into the house of one of their principle gods, Dagon. Here, placed before Dagon in some symbolically subordinate position, is the Ark of God. Dagon now prevails over God as the Philistines prevailed over Israel -- or so the Philistines suppose. They are in for a rude awakening.

What a shock they have early the next morning when people arrive to praise and worship their god, Dagon, for the victory it has given over Israel. There, in its own temple, their idol lies prostrate in the dirt before the Ark of God. Imagine the excuses and explanations made in defense of their “god.” It must not have been properly positioned. Could it have been an earthquake? Whatever the reason, one can be sure that their god is now securely anchored in its “house” when the Philistine priests leave that day. There will be no more falling on its face, that is for sure.

Does a larger than usual group assemble at the house of Dagon the following day? Do the Philistines want to convince themselves that the previous morning was some kind of fluke? Is this nothing but an “act of God” (as insurance adjusters say)? When they arrive early the next morning, things are even worse than the previous day. Dagon has fallen before God once again, but this time its hands and head are broken off as the idol strikes the threshold. Do the Philistines still think the God of Israel is in their hands? The hands of their god are in the dirt, as well as its head. The Ark of God may be in Philistine hands, but the god of the Philistines is in the hands of the only true God, the God of Israel.

Is Dagon in the hands of an angry God? I think so. The most amazing thing about verses 1-5 is not the prostration of Dagon before the Ark of God, but the response of the Philistine priests to this second symbolic scene. The Ark of God is not an idol; the Ark of God is not Israel’s God. The Ark is a symbol of God’s presence among His people. It plays an important role in Israel’s worship, but it is not an idol. Dagon is an idol, which men have fashioned to be their god. This Philistine idol has twice fallen before the Ark of God and broken upon impact, requiring repairs. The Philistine “god” falls before the Ark of God and then has to go back into the shop for repairs. What should this tell the Philistines?

Does a real God have to be picked up off the ground? Does a real God fall apart? Does a real God have to be glued back together? If these pagan priests are thinking properly, they will see that Dagon’s image belongs on the scrap heap or in the city dump. What kind of a “god” has to be set upright by its subjects and carried off for repairs because it is broken? Yet these priests do not humble themselves and confess that the God of Israel is the only true God. They do not give up worshipping a piece of wood, stone, or metal. Instead, they pronounce the threshold on which the idol breaks to be holy. From this point on, the threshold becomes a sacred object. The threshold’s destruction of their god should have taught them a lesson, but it is a lesson the Philistines did not learn. No wonder there are some even more difficult lessons yet to come.

Troubled by Tumours

(5:6-12)

In some ways, the author has already prepared us for what we read in verses 6-12 of chapter 5:

6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, “What *does* the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews *mean*?” Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. 7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “God has come into the camp.” And they said, “Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. 8 “Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods *who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues* in the wilderness. 9 “Take courage and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you; therefore, be men and fight” (1 Samuel 4:6-9, emphasis mine).

Here in chapter 4, the Philistines are about to once again engage the Israelites in battle when they learn that the Israelites have brought along the Ark of God to take into battle with them. When the Philistines learn about the Ark coming with the Israelites into battle, they are deeply frightened. They recall the role the Ark played in Israel’s past, especially in relation to Israel’s deliverance from the Egyptians at the exodus. It is one thing for the Philistines to speak of the defeat of Pharaoh and his army, because they are about to go to war with the Israelites. Instead, the Philistines speak to one another about how God smites the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. What do plagues have to do with going to war with the Israelites? The Philistines see a connection, and our author makes certain we know it. The end result is that what the Philistines fear in chapter 4 comes upon them in chapter 5.

Inside the house of Dagon, God shows the Philistines that their idol is powerless in His hands. Now God begins to work on the Philistines themselves. Do they think themselves victorious over God? The hands of Dagon have been broken off. The **“hand of God”** has done it. Now, the **“hand of God”** is heavy on the Philistines in the place where the Ark is kept -- Ashdod and its surrounding territory. It is impossible to be dogmatic about the exact identity of the plague God brings upon the Philistines. Some translations suggest that the malady God brings upon the Ashdodites (and later the inhabitants of the other places where the Ark is sent) is hemorrhoids. Others think it is some kind of tumor with which God smites the Philistines. We do not know with certainty and probably will not know until the Lord comes. While there is a kind of “poetic justice” to the thought of the Philistines suffering from haemorrhoids, the plague seems much more serious than this. It appears that people are not merely suffering from pain

and irritation, but that they are dying like flies. Some conclude that since there are tumours and many deaths somehow associated with rodents, this must have been a manifestation of the bubonic plague. They may well be right.

Whatever the plague, the Philistines do not like it, and they are eager to be rid of it. The Philistine leaders know that the plague the Ashdodites are suffering is due to the presence of the Ark of God in their midst. They know it is the hand of God heavily upon them. He is judging them and their “god,” Dagon. Consequently, they reason that the only way to be rid of the plague is to be rid of the Ark. The leaders reach a political decision: send the Ark of God on to Gath, the next major Philistine city. The implied result is a cessation of the plague at Ashdod. We are clearly told that sending the Ark to Gath is followed by an outbreak of the plague in and around the city of Gath. The plague follows the Ark.

It is therefore decided that the Ark will be sent away, this time to the city of Ekron. The people at Ekron are not that gullible. No “Madison Avenue” sales job can convince the people of this place that what they really need is the Ark of the God of Israel -- accompanied by a deadly plague. When the people of Ekron know the Ark is on its way, they refuse to accept it. I am reminded of one of my “little friends” who loves to play “Old Maid.” I cannot describe to you the look of anguish on her face which she seems unable to disguise when she gets the “Old Maid.” The people of Ekron feel much more strongly about being selected to receive the Ark of God. It becomes obvious that if no Philistine city will take the Ark, then it will have to be sent back from whence it came. Without a military confrontation, without international negotiations, Israel is getting back the Ark it lost some seven months earlier.

Once again, it is apparent that the Philistines recognize that the plague which is visiting various Philistine cities is due to the presence of the Ark of God in their midst. They know that the Ark means trouble, and that this trouble is God’s judgment upon them and their “god,” Dagon. What they do not do is reject their heathen idolatry and their impotent “god.” Neither do they trust in the God of Israel and worship Him. They simply want God to “get out of their town.”

I am reminded of the response of the people who lived in the country of the Geresenes, as described in Mark 5. When Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee and casts the demon from the dreaded and powerful demoniac, “Legion,” the people of that place are terrified. They ask Jesus to leave town as soon as possible. They do not want One this good and this powerful among them. He is too threatening. The Ark of God is too holy and too hot to handle, and they want only to be rid of it.

Putting the Ark in its Place

(6:1—7:2)

1 Now the ark of the LORD had been in the country of the Philistines seven months. 2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we shall send it to its place.” 3 And they said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you shall be healed and it shall be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.” 4 Then they said, “What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?” And they said, “Five golden tumours and five golden mice *according to* the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of you and on your lords. 5 “So you shall make likenesses of your tumours and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land. 6 “Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed? 7 “Now therefore take and prepare a new cart and two milch cows on which there has never been a yoke; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves home, away from them. 8 “And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go. 9 “And watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance.” 10 Then the men did so, and took two milch cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. 11 And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the likenesses of their tumours. 12 And the cows took the straight way in the direction of Beth-shemesh; they went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. And the lords of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh. 13 Now *the people of* Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark and were glad to see *it*. 14 And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stood there where there *was* a large stone; and they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. 15 And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the box that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone; and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed

sacrifices that day to the LORD. 16 And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Ekron that day. 17 And these are the golden tumours which the Philistines returned for a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; 18 and the golden mice, *according* to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fortified cities and of country villages. The large stone on which they set the ark of the LORD *is a witness* to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite. 19 And He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter. 20 And the men of Beth-shemesh said, “Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up from us?” 21 So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, “The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up to you.” 7:1 And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. 2 And it came about from the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim that the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

For seven months, the Ark of the Lord is in apparent “captivity.” Seven months the Philistines are plagued under the heavy^s hand of God. The only remaining option is now clear: the Ark must be returned to Israel. The only question is, “How?” In chapter 5, where the Ark is considered a political problem, it is discussed by the Philistine lords and then passed from one city to the next, until no one wants it. Now, the Ark is a religious problem, and the Philistine priests are asked how the Ark can be returned in such a way as to not further infuriate the God of Israel.

The Philistine priests give the lords of the land very specific instructions regarding the return of the Ark. These instructions are not based upon any understanding of God or His law, but rather they are the outworking of their own pagan theology. The Ark must not be sent away *empty*, they advise. It must be accompanied by a guilt offering.^a It is interesting that the idea of guilt is raised. This does not seem to be out of a sense of personal or even national sin. Rather it seems to be based on an assumption that the plagues are the manifestation of God’s nationalistic pride and resulting anger, due to the capture of the Ark. Israel’s God must be appeased, but how? The Philistine priests can think of but one thing to do: idolize the solution. They counsel the Philistine lords to appease God by making a guilt offering of gold. This is no mere

offering of gold as though it were a bribe, but five golden images of haemorrhoids (or tumours) and five of mice (or rats). They assure the lords that this will appease God, resulting in the healing of Philistines from the plague. If this action succeeds in stopping the plague, then the Philistines can be assured that they have found the explanation for God's anger and their suffering.

In some ways, the Philistines' knowledge about Israel's history and Israel's God is amazing. They are well aware of the exodus. They know that Pharaoh and the Egyptians hardened their hearts against God, even though He brought numerous plagues upon them. They do not wish to make this same mistake. Thus, they suggest letting the Ark go back to Israel, along with a guilt offering. The Egyptians erred by not letting the Israelites go. They will not err by refusing to let the Ark go.

While the Philistines are eager to be rid of the Ark, they still want to be cautious. They are completely willing to admit that the Ark of the God of Israel is the source of their suffering. They will "let the Ark go" as the Egyptians let Israel go, but they will not just send the Ark away. They devise a plan which will only work if the Ark is the cause of their suffering, and only if God is able to override the course of nature. The priests advise the Philistine lords to put the Ark, along with the guilt offering, on a new ox cart. The cart is to be drawn by two milk cows, both with still nursing calves. The calves are to be locked up, apart from their mothers. The cows are then to be yoked to the cart and left free to go. If these cows follow the course of nature, they will turn back to their calves. If the plagues are from God, who wants the Ark returned, then the cows will leave their calves behind, drawing the Ark directly to Israel. If the cows draw the cart and the Ark back to the Israelites, it is safe to assume that all of the Philistines' troubles are from this God and that they have made the right choice in letting the Ark go. If not, they will be able to keep the Ark, assured that all the plagues are merely a coincidence.

The cows are yoked to the cart and their calves locked up apart from their mothers. The Ark and the "guilt offering" are placed in the cart, and the cows are released. They head straight for the road leading to Beth Shemesh in Israel, lowing as they go,²⁶ not turning aside to the left or to the right. The Philistine lords follow from a distance, until they observe the cart and its cargo coming to a halt in Israelite territory.

Before turning our attention to the Israelites' response to the return of the Ark, let us pause to ponder the "guilt offering" the Philistines offer the God of Israel. As mentioned earlier, this guilt offering is the product of the Philistines' pagan religion and not the practice of the Jewish faith, as prescribed in the Law of Moses. In the Law of Moses, a guilt offering was a blood sacrifice. There is no

blood involved in the Philistines' guilt offering. The reason for a guilt offering is the sin of the one offering the sacrifice to God. There is no acknowledgment of sin by the Philistines but rather an idolization of the instruments of divine judgment: rats (or mice) and haemorrhoids (or tumours). The Philistines do not realize that their offering is an offense to the God of Israel and not an offering which will appease His anger. There is a certain human wisdom about the guilt offering. After all, are not the rats part of the plague, and are not the tumours the instrument of God's wrath? There are five lords and five principle cities, so why not five golden tumours and five golden rodents? Logical though their offering might be, it is not biblical. The cessation of the plagues and the healing of the Philistines are not results of their "guilt offering", but gifts of God's grace.

The Israelites of Beth Shemesh who witness the return of the Ark are ecstatic when they realize that the Ark has returned to Israel. Those reaping in the fields are the first to see it, and the Israelites of that place quickly and joyfully offer up a sacrifice to God, using the wood of the cart to fuel the fire and the cows which drew the cart as the offering. It is a great and festive occasion, but the spirits of the Israelite worshippers are quickly subdued when a plague breaks out on the people of Beth Shemesh. Some of the people have carelessly and disobediently looked into or upon^a the Ark of the Lord, so that a significant number of the inhabitants of that place are struck dead.^a

The survivors of this slaughter are horrified and shocked. They do not know what to do. Why did God strike so many worshipping Israelites dead? If people die for such reasons as this, how can the Ark remain among them? Who is able to stand in the presence of the Holy God? And to whom will they send the Ark? It seems almost like a "Catch 22" situation. The Israelites find themselves in a situation quite similar to the one facing the Philistines, except that the Ark belongs in Israel, not among the Philistines.

The Philistines suffer a plague from the hand of God because they have the Ark in their midst. And so the Philistines of one city seek to send the Ark of God to another city. Now, back in Israel, the Israelites suffer from a severe plague from the heavy hand of God. Like the Philistines, the Israelites of Beth Shemesh seek to send the Ark to some other place, so that the heavy hand of God may be turned away from them. The nearby city of Kiriath-jearim is chosen. Men from that city come and take the Ark of God to their city, putting it in the house of Abinidab, specifically under the care of Eleazar, his son, who is consecrated for this task. There the Ark of God will remain for some 20 years, until it is retrieved by David. For the next 20 years, there will be no "rabbit's foot" in which the Israelites can place their trust. They will have to trust in God Himself, as assisted by Samuel, their prophet, priest, and judge.

During these years, we are told that all Israel laments for the LORD. Just what does this mean? Is this the kind of “mourning” our Lord calls “**blessed**” in the Sermon on the Mount? To lament is to express regret over the way things are. It seems that all Israel laments over the fact that while the Ark has returned to Israel, it is of no functional use. It is, so to speak, out of commission. It is something like a one-of-a-kind device with a most important function which is out of order, unable to be used. It seems as though this is viewed as a great tragedy, and yet the remaining verses of chapter 7 seem to indicate the opposite. In spite of the fact that the Ark is out of commission and cannot be taken into battle, the people of Israel repent of their sins, turn from their idols, trust in God, and find victory in war.

7. Samuel as judge

Verses 1-8. Samuel’s message

Verses 9-14. Victory at Ebenezer

Verses 15-17. Summary of the ministry of Samuel

Happy Days Are Here Again, With Samuel and Without the Ark

1 Samuel 7:3-17

3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.” 4 So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone. 5 Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” 6 And they gathered to Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah. 7 Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8 Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” 9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to the LORD; and Samuel cried to the LORD for Israel and the LORD answered him. 10 Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them,

so that they were routed before Israel. 11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car. 12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." 13 So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. 14 And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. So there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. 15 Now Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. 16 And he used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel in all these places. 17 Then his return *was* to Ramah, for his house *was* there, and there he judged Israel; and he built there an altar to the LORD.

Samuel is strangely absent from the narrative of chapters 4-6. His name is not mentioned from chapter 4, verse 2, through chapter 7, verse 2. Samuel does not seem to be with the Ark when it is foolishly taken into battle against the Philistines in chapter 4. He is not a part of the humiliation of the Philistines in chapters 5 and 6. But Samuel is very much a part of the revival of Israel as described in chapter 7. The very things which are not happening in Israel when the Ark is in Shiloh are the things which happen without the involvement of the Ark in chapter 7. The Ark is not the instrument through which God works (as the Israelites previously falsely assumed); He works through the Word of the Lord and prayer spoken by the prophet Samuel.

God takes away Israel's security blanket, the Ark, and now they have to look elsewhere for security. Samuel tells them where to look. Samuel calls upon the nation to return to the LORD with all their hearts. They will show this by putting away all their pagan idols. (And so, we see that the Ark of God is really one idol among many to the Israelites – the greatest idol, perhaps, but only an idol.) This the people do, purposing to serve God alone and to look to Him alone for deliverance from the Philistines. Samuel then gathers all of Israel to Mizpah, not far from his home in Ramah, promising that he will pray to the LORD on behalf of the nation there. The people draw water and pour it out before the LORD. Because we are told that the people also *fasted* that day, it seems as though the nation refrains from food or water as a token of their repentance and sincerity in seeking God. When they confess their sins, Samuel prays for the Israelites.

Mizpah was apparently a high place which overlooked the surrounding area. Militarily speaking, it was the ideal location to defend oneself in battle. The Philistines have not yet learned their lesson from the heavy hand of God. They assume that the nation Israel has gathered at Mizpah for war. The Philistines

have been victorious in waging war with the Israelites before, and so they assume they will be successful once again. The Israelites are frightened when they learn that the Philistines are coming. They do not have the Ark to take to war with them (and, besides, it didn't work the last time they tried to use it), so all they can do is cast themselves upon God and trust in Him. They will have to appeal to Him on the basis of grace, not magic. They cry out to Samuel, beseeching him to pray to the LORD on their behalf, asking Him to deliver them from the approaching Philistines.

Samuel offers a whole burnt offering to the LORD on behalf of the Israelites. He cries out to the LORD, beseeching Him to deliver the Israelites, and God answers his prayer. Samuel is still offering the sacrifice to the LORD as the Philistine warriors arrive. The Israelites are completely unprepared for this attack, but the LORD seems to bring about a great thunderstorm (or at least the sounds of thunder) which causes great confusion among the Philistine warriors and enables the Israelites to overcome them. From Mizpah, the Israelites pursue the Philistines as far as Beth Car, a city whose location is not known. Samuel then sets up a stone between Mizpah and Shen, calling the stone "**Ebenezer**," which means, "stone or rock of my help," a commemoration that this battle has been won by the LORD'S help.

The result is that the Philistine domination over Israel ends. From then on, they do not invade Israel all the days of Samuel, for the hand of the LORD is upon him and against them. The cities which the Philistines have taken from the Israelites are restored to Israel. Peace is also established between the Israelites and the Amorites. All of this our author directly relates to the reign of Samuel. Samuel is a priest, a prophet, and a judge over all Israel. He is a kind of "circuit judge," who makes his rounds from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in each of these locations. When he makes his circuit, he always returns home to Ramah. He judges Israel there also, and there he builds an altar to the Lord.^a

Conclusion

The first thing that impresses me about this text is the reversals which are apparent. Israel is not serving God alone, with a whole heart. All sorts of evils are being practiced in the very place where the Ark is kept. The priests are corrupt, wicked, and unrepentant. Israel goes to war with the Philistines, taking the Ark along for certainty of victory, is then miserably defeated, and the Ark is captured and taken back to Ashdod in Philistine territory. Yet, by the end of the story, the Ark is returned. Israel repents of her sins, turns from her idols, and trusts in God alone. When the Philistines attack the Israelites at worship, God defeats them, and the period of Philistine domination over Israel ends. It is important to see clearly how these reversals happen. The return of the Ark, the

repentance and revival of Israel, and the decisive military defeat of the Philistines come about as the result of the power and grace of God, and not as a result of Israel's spiritual merit or magical use of the Ark.

A second reversal is a bit more subtle but very apparent upon reflection. There is a very distinct change of mood and mindset in our text from chapters 1 through 5 to chapters 6 and 7. It took me a while to realize my own change of mood as I worked through the text. At the outset of the lesson in chapter 5, I found myself very light-hearted, chuckling my way through the author's inspired account of God's humbling of Dagon and the Philistines who serve this idol. For centuries, Jews have probably read this account of the Ark's seven-month sojourn in Philistine territory, rolling in the aisles with laughter. "How foolish the Philistines were," a devout Jew might think as he reads this account. "How can they be so slow to be convinced that this is the 'heavy hand of God'?" How can they be so foolish as to attempt to pacify God's righteous anger with a 'guilt offering' of golden hemorrhoids and rats? And look at the sheer foolishness of sending the Ark back to Israel in an ox cart!"

If the Philistines are so foolish, and this could be the source of amusement for a devout Jew, I wonder how the look on these same Jewish faces changes when the Israelites begin dying in great numbers, for essentially the same reason: irreverence for the holy things of God and disobedience to the commands which specifically forbid what they are doing (such as looking at or into the Ark). If it amuses the Jewish readers to see the Philistines shuffling the Ark from one city to another, how do they respond to the Israelites of Beth Shemesh trying to send the Ark off to Kiriath Jearim?

The simple fact is that the Israelites of Samuel's day err in a way very similar to the error of the Philistines. Both the Israelites and the Philistines tend to take the Ark too lightly. They have no appreciation for the holiness of God and these sacred objects. Both tend to look upon the Ark as an idol. Both seek to control God, rather than to trust in Him and obey His commands.

It seems as though the error of the Israelites and the Philistines is long ago and far away. How can we, enlightened as we are, possibly repeat the same sins? The answer, in short, is, "Easy." Let's look first at the sins of the Israelites. Let me make several statements, framed in the culture of the ancient times we are considering, and then give some thought to their modern counterparts and the error of such thinking.

- (1) "The way to win pagan Philistines over to the true Israelite faith is to invite pagans to our worship, to downplay any negative, offensive elements (no matter how crucial to the faith), and focus on making the Philistines feel comfortable and welcome at our worship."

(2) “As long as we are sincere in our worship, God doesn’t care about the form our worship takes. If our worship of God differs from the way Israel once worshipped, it is only because God is at work creating new and exciting ways to worship Him.”

(3) “I know God said in His Law that the holy things of the Tabernacle should be handled in a certain way and that only certain people could perform certain functions, but this is politically incorrect. Everyone should be equal in the sense that no function excludes some and includes others. So forget this business about only the Levites transporting the Ark, and let anyone who feels led to do so assume the role of a Levite in worship.”

(4) “There is a magical way, by which we can manipulate God, bringing Him under our control, so as to satisfy our lusts and indulge our sinful desires. This is to take the symbol of God’s presence along with us, expecting that the symbol guarantees us success in life. . . .” Another form of this, seen throughout Israel’s history, is to see the commands and promises of God as a kind of magical formula: “If I do this, this, and this, God must do that. . . .” This is “god in a box” thinking, and God will not be put in a box, though He surely can and will put those who try to deal with Him in this way in a box.

The Philistines err in several ways, and we should pause to consider the nature of their error. The one thing that most fascinates me about the Philistines is their use and abuse of the scientific method. Our text goes to great efforts to inform us of the many things the Philistines do to “test” their experiences, so that they can be sure it is really the “heavy hand of God” which causes them to suffer the plagues which come upon them. They try to keep an open mind when God sends Dagon sprawling to the floor, breaking it to pieces the second time. They want to be convinced that the plagues which come upon them are also from the hand of God. Then there is the carefully planned means for the Ark to be “released” to return to Israel. All of these are ancient manifestations of what we call “the scientific method.”

Sadly, the Philistines appear to be scientific, but they do not want to go where the evidence points. When all the evidence points to Israel’s God being alive, all-powerful, and actively engaged in caring for His people, the Philistines nevertheless choose to “send God out of town,” and at the same time, continue to serve their dead, broken-down “god,” Dagon. They prop him up, glue him back together, and even sanctify the threshold on which he comes apart, but they will not forsake him as a dead idol to worship and serve the living God.

I sometimes hear Christians criticized for being “unscientific,” and I also hear Christians criticizing the “scientific method.” In fact, when applied scientifically, the scientific method points to the truths which Christians embrace. Is it scientific for the Philistines to perform all of their scientific tests and then go back to their dead idols? It would be much more scientific for them to forsake their idols and trust in the God of Israel. Do some criticize Christians as unscientific? Unbelief is far more unreasonable, far more unscientific.

Having said this, I wish to point out how God works in the lives of His people to bring them from immorality and idolatry to repentance and revival. Our text clearly lays out a sequence of events and changes, leading up to the spiritual renewal of the nation Israel. First, God produces in the Israelites a deep sense of the holiness of God and a corresponding fear (or reverence) for God. Immorality and violence take place in the context of Israel’s sacrifices and sacred objects (like the Ark). The Ark is taken to war as if it is a rabbit’s foot. After many are struck dead for merely looking at (or in) the Ark, the Israelites begin to wonder who is able to stand before the LORD (6:20). Now the people of God are beginning to grasp how utterly different, how vastly superior the one true God is. This is the starting point for Israel’s revival. *It is my conviction that this is where all true revival begins, with a deep sense of the holiness of God, and a corresponding sense of the magnitude of our sin and our unworthiness before our holy God.* The Israelites see the sin of their idolatry and repent of their sins by forsaking their idols and turning to God alone. This is what men must do today. *God has provided but one means by which sinful men may be forgiven and may be made righteous, and that is through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.* When the Israelites sought God first and foremost, God gave them the victory over their enemies. So it is today. *A deep sense of the holiness of God, followed by a corresponding awareness and confession of our sins, and a forsaking of any other object of trust other than God and His provisions – this is the way God leads sinners from irreverence, sin, and judgment to righteousness, forgiveness, peace, and access into the presence of our holy God.*



Abu Gosh where the Ark stayed for a time before it was taken to Jerusalem

8. Israel's demand for a king

Verses 1-3. Failure of the judgeship

Verses 4-22. Demand for the kingship

1 Samuel 8:1-22

Important Observations

Before beginning our exposition of 1 Samuel 8, several very important observations should be made as they bear heavily on the way we understand and apply our text.

First, God becomes Israel's king at the Exodus.

When God delivers the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and gives them His law, He establishes Himself as their King. In a very real sense, the contest with Pharaoh is between one King and another. It is after the Israelites cross the Red Sea that they first realize this, expressing the fact in their hymn of praise:

16 “Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; Until Thy people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased. 17 “Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. 18 “*The LORD shall reign forever and ever*” (Exodus 15:16-18, emphasis mine).

God is the One who promises to “**go before**” (and behind) His people, as a king would do (see Exodus 23:23; Isaiah 45:2; 52:12). Old Testament scholars have noted that the giving of the Law, as the establishment of a covenant between God and Israel in Exodus through Deuteronomy, follows the same form of treaties or covenants made between ancient kings and their subjects in that day. The people of that day would immediately recognize the implication – that God is establishing the covenant basis for His rule as King over Israel. This is more clearly indicated elsewhere.

1 Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death. 2 And he said, “The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them. 3 “Indeed, He loves the people; All Thy holy ones are in Thy hand, And they followed in Thy steps; *Everyone* receives of Thy words. 4 “Moses charged us with a law, A possession for the assembly of Jacob. 5 “*And He was king in Jeshurun*, When the heads of the people were gathered, The tribes of Israel together (Deuteronomy 33:1-5, emphasis mine; see also Exodus 19:3-6; Leviticus 20:26; 25:23).

In Psalm 74, Asaph looks upon God’s actions during the exodus as evidence that God is King of Israel:

12 Yet God is my king from of old, Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth. 13 Thou didst divide the sea by Thy strength; Thou didst break the heads of the sea monsters in the waters. 14 Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan; Thou didst give him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. 15 Thou didst break open springs and torrents; Thou didst dry up ever-flowing streams (Psalm 74:12-15; see also Psalm 47:2-3).

Second, after He delivers the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, God prepares them for the fact that they will have a king.

In Genesis 49:8-12, it is clear that a descendant of Judah will rule over Israel. In the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24:15-19, a similar prediction is made of

one of Jacob's descendants ruling and defeating the enemies of the people of God. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, God indicates that there will be a time when Israel will ask for a king. More will be said about this prophecy later, but it should be pointed out here that 1 Samuel 8 is a very literal fulfillment of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 17:14.

Third, this is the first of three times in 1 Samuel when God speaks to the Israelites through Samuel concerning the evil of demanding a king (see also 10:17-19; 12:6-18).

Chapter 8 is the first account of Israel's demand for a king, of the response of Samuel and of God, and of the admonition Samuel gives to the people. But let us bear in mind that this matter will also be taken up in chapters 10 and 12. To understand 1 Samuel 8, we must study it in the light of chapters 10 and 12.

Fourth, the emphasis here in chapter 8 is not the evil of Israel's rejection of God and their idolatry (though this is pointed out); the emphasis is upon the high cost of a king (verses 10-18).

The "principle of proportion"² is always an important clue to the meaning and interpretation of a text. In our chapter, we know that Israel's demand for a king is idolatry, idolatry of the same kind Israel has practiced since the exodus (8:7-9). We know that when Samuel speaks to the people, he tells them "all the words of the LORD" (verse 10), but what is written and preserved for us is the content of verses 10-18, which is a detailed description of the costs of a kingship. The cost of kingship is the emphasis of Samuel's words in this chapter.

Fifth, the demand for a king does not come from the elders of Israel alone (verse 4) but from all the people (see verses 7, 10, 19, 21-22).

At first glance, it seems as though only the elders³ of Israel are demanding a king. As the chapter unfolds, it is very clear that all of the people of Israel are behind this movement to have a king. This indicates to me that Israel is functioning here somewhat as a democracy. Their elders are not leading, as much as they are representing the people.

Sixth, note that as we move from chapter 7 to chapter 8, we move from the beginning of Samuel's "rule" as judge in chapter 7 to the apparent "end" of his rule in chapter 8.

The great bulk of Samuel's ministry is passed over in 1 Samuel. This may be because the author wants us to see more clearly the contrast between the way Samuel's "rule" began and the way the people want it to end. Samuel is, indeed,

the last of a dying breed – the judges. But let us remember what the author of the Book of Judges says at the beginning of his work:

16 Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. 17 And yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers. 18 And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. 19 But it came *about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers*, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways (Judges 2:16-19, emphasis mine).

What fascinates me is that in the “good old days” of the judges, the people of God followed the Lord during the lifetime of the judge. Only after the judge died did Israel turn away from God and act corruptly. But in Samuel’s case, he is not dead at all. He is simply getting old and has partially retired. Already they are eager to be rid of him. This is amazing.

Seventh, our text in no way suggests that Samuel is another Eli, a weak and pathetic leader.

There is no greater judge in all of Israel’s history than Samuel. Samuel often speaks to the Israelites for God. No prophecy of Eli is recorded. In fact, Eli receives his revelations second-hand (see 2:27-36; 3:1-18). Samuel is a great man of prayer (see 7:5; 8:6, 21; 15:11). We do not read of Eli’s prayers. Samuel is a decisive leader, who acts where Saul would not (1 Samuel 15:32-33). Eli could not be called decisive, and some may not even call him a leader. Samuel is instrumental in the military defeat of the Philistines (7:13), but Eli is associated with a period of military defeat (compare 4:9 and 7:13-14). Samuel is a man of great personal integrity (see 12:1-5), while the same cannot be said for Eli, who seems to have gotten fat off the meats his sons wrongly acquire (see 2:29). Samuel’s death is the occasion for national mourning (25:1; 28:3), but this is not so with Eli’s death (4:12-22). Let us allow the Scriptures themselves to sum up the life of Samuel:

18 And there had not been celebrated a Passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did with the priests, the Levites, all Judah and

Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 35:18).

6 Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called on His name; They called upon the LORD, and He answered them (Psalm 99:6).

1 Then the LORD said to me, “Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go! (Jeremiah 15:1)

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets (Hebrews 11:32).

The simple fact is that Samuel is the greatest judge of all time. During the period of his service, Israel reaches one of its spiritual “high water marks.” No rebuke of Samuel is found in 1 Samuel, either as a prophet or as a father.

Eighth, the Israelites’ reasons for wanting a king in verses 1-4 do not tell the whole story, revealed as the events of the next few chapters are described. I

It is not just Samuel’s age and the corruption of his sons which prompt the Israelites to demand a king. From chapter 12, we learn that the military threat posed by Nahash, the king of Ammon, is perhaps the fundamental reason the Israelites want a king. The Ark of God is out of commission, Samuel is soon to be, and the Israelites want a king in whom they can place their trust.

A King is Demanded (8:1-5)

1 And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; *they* were judging in Beersheba. 3 His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice.” 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.”

The bulk of Samuel’s life and ministry is passed over until chapter 8 where we find him as a man getting up in his years, perhaps looking toward retirement. His two sons are appointed by Samuel as judges “**for Israel**,”²⁸ stationed in the frontier town of Beersheba. I do not think Samuel named his sons as his replacement nor that he can do so. Samuel is not only a priest and a judge, he is

also a prophet. We have no indication that God thus gifted his sons, so how can either or both replace their father? Like other elders and leaders in the nation, they can serve as judges. But the sphere of their ministry and authority is limited, and when it becomes obvious that these two have become corrupt, the inference may be drawn that Samuel deals with the problem. Nothing more is said of their corruption or their ministry. In chapter 12, Samuel speaks of his sons as being with the people (verse 2). Samuel claims to have done the people no injustice and to have been guilty of no corruption, a fact which the people affirm. How can he speak thus if he has not dealt with the corruption of his own sons? Samuel's two sons are not godly men like their father; they do not **“walk in his ways.”**

Things are not as they appear or as the elders represent them, however. They seem to suggest that Samuel is “as good as dead,” that his leadership is over. Our text indicates otherwise. He has a number of years of ministry left. I believe we can safely say that the years Samuel leads the nation after chapter 8 are more significant than the many years he led them prior to this (the very years the author chose not to include in his account). Furthermore, the threat Samuel's sons pose is exaggerated. Samuel's sons are not his replacement, and they do not have that great a role to play in the nation's future. I do not think the elders or the people are as concerned with the leaders they see before them as they are with the unknown leaders they do not see. Who will lead the people after Samuel? They want to have a man in place. So they demand -- not request -- a king like all the nations have.

If anything, the solution the elders propose is foolish. Think of the folly of their logic, which goes something like this:

“Samuel, you are getting old, and your sons (who surely will replace you) are corrupt. We cannot have a bright future if our leaders are corrupt. Let's establish a whole new order and have a king, like the other nations. And let this king judge us. And let there be a dynasty, so that his sons will rule in his place after his death.”

Samuel's role as judge is not a dynasty. God raised up judges; He did not create a dynasty of judges, whose sons replace them. If Samuel's sons are corrupt, they can be set aside, as they are. But to propose a dynasty is to call for a system in which the king's sons will rule in his place, whether they are wicked or righteous. The cure is worse than the problem!

It appears that the elders and the nation are not seeking a radical change but recommending a refinement of the current system, an administrative “tune up.” They want justice. They want a judge who settles their legal questions. They simply want a king to be their judge, rather than having a judge like Samuel. It

sounds good, but it is not a simple change at all. They want to completely overhaul the system of justice for Israel. They want to be rid of this system of judges and be ruled and judged in the same manner the nations around them are judged. They don't want to be a distinct nation, set apart from the nations around them. They are not simply attempting to fire Samuel as their judge; they are seeking to fire God as their King. God makes this clear in the following verses.

The Response of Samuel and God

(8:6-9)

6 But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us. “And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. 8 “Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day -- in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods -- so they are doing to you also. 9 “Now then, listen to their voice; however, you shall solemnly warn them and tell them of the procedure of the king who will reign over them.”

Samuel is not at all pleased with the elders' proposal. While it is true that they are seeking his replacement, I do not think Samuel's displeasure is because he takes this personally and responds defensively. Literally, the text tells us that this is **“evil in the sight of Samuel.”** Simply put, Samuel knows that their request is wrong and that is it sinful.

Samuel's response further confirms his godly character. He does not pop off, scorching the elders with his disapproval and anger. He goes to God in prayer, as he is inclined to do. God's response to Samuel's prayer confirms Samuel's assessment of the situation, with a further twist. Samuel is being rejected by the people; there is little question that this is true. As a godly man, Samuel may agonize over whether this is due to some failure on his part. God informs Samuel that ultimately it is He, not Samuel, whom they are rejecting. God's rejection by Israel is certainly not God's fault, so why should Samuel agonize over his rejection? If Samuel is being rejected for the same reasons God is, then Samuel should take this as a compliment.

As noted earlier, God becomes Israel's King at the exodus. Now, God reminds Samuel that Israel's current rejection of Him is not something new, but rather one more instance in a rather constant succession of rejections, beginning at the time of the exodus (verse 8). This rejection of God as King for a king **“like the nations”** is nothing less than idolatry. The king they want is really their “god,” a

matter taken up more fully later. Having exposed the roots of this present proposition, God goes on to instruct Samuel to listen to the people and give them their way (verse 9a). Although Samuel is to grant the people their request, he is also to indicate to them the “**procedure**” of the king who “**will reign over them**” (verse 9b).

The Custom (Cost) of a King

(8:10-18)

10 So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. 11 And he said, “This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: *he will take* your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots. 12 “And *he will appoint for himself* commanders of thousands and of fifties, and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest and to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 “*He will also take* your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 “And *he will take* the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. 15 “And *he will take* a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. 16 “*He will also take* your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use *them* for his work. 17 “*He will take* a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. 18 “Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day” (emphasis mine).

The words recorded in verses 10-18 are not the sum total of all Samuel says to the people on this occasion. They are what the author wished to emphasize for us, the reader. Verse 10 indicates to us that Samuel “**spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king.**” Samuel thus tells the people what God tells him in verses 7-9, and perhaps other words God speaks which are not recorded in our text. But the author wants us to focus upon the words recorded in verses 10-18. This appears to be the heart of this text -- or at least a very significant part of Samuel’s message to the Israelites who demand a king.

Our Lord had many would-be “volunteers” who offered to become His followers. To such persons, our Lord’s response was one of caution. Jesus cautioned those who offered to follow Him to “**count the cost**” (see Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-35). Samuel does the same thing here in our text. He urges the Israelites to “count the cost” of having a king. The essence of Samuel’s words to the people can be summed up with one phrase: “**He will take. . . .**”

Israel is demanding a very expensive kind of government. Samuel seeks to spell out the cost of kingship, and it is amazingly expensive. In order for us to appreciate the high cost of having a king, we must first refresh our memories on how things worked under the rule of judges. In the Book of Judges we see that there is no king, no palace, no standing army. When Israel is attacked, a volunteer army is assembled. In part, this army is supplied by the families of those who fight (see 1 Samuel 17:17-22). There is no “administration” of counsellors, advisors, servants and staff, who support and facilitate the king’s reign. In short, the system is informal, ad hoc, and very inexpensive. With God as their King, it works, as we can see in the Book of Judges and in 1 Samuel 7, for example.

In contrast to a “low budget” system as a means of ruling a nation, what the Israelites are demanding is very costly. To have a king who will go before them and lead them to war is to have a standing army. Once Israel is ruled by a king, life on the farm will never be the same. The king will draft their sons into military service, driving his chariots or serving as a horseman, or as one of the infantry. Some will be drafted as officers. A standing army must also have supplies. Israelite sons will be used to plant and harvest crops and build and maintain military equipment (not to mention all of the non-military supplies required). It is not just the young men whom the king will draft into his service. The Israelites’ daughters, who once sat or served at their fathers’ table, will now serve the king’s table. They will be perfumers, cooks, and bakers.

The high cost of a king includes the loss of sons and daughters to the king’s service. But the price tag is much larger than this. The king will consume a large quantity of food, very fine food. This will require the king to assess a tax upon all that is grown in Israel. The best of their grain will go to the king, along with the finest of their vineyards and groves. A good portion of the fine things an Israelite farm family once enjoyed will now be consumed by the king’s servants. The king’s servants will need to live also, and the people will pick up the tab for this as well. A tenth of their seed and vines will enable the king’s servants to plant their fields (on land the king takes from the people).

The king will need a staff to serve him, and so he will take the best Israel has to offer for male and female servants. Of course the king will require livestock, and donkeys to plough the king’s fields, all of which the people will supply. In short, when the people are granted a king, it is to rule over them, and rule he will. These people who have known such freedom will now become slaves of the king. And when they finally realize what they have gotten themselves into, it will be too late to change the course of history. The Israelites will someday cry out to God because of the oppression of their own king, but God will not be

willing to hear their outcry, for they are going into this slavery with their eyes wide open.

The Israelites Get What They Want

(8:19-22)

19 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles. “ 21 Now after Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the LORD'S hearing. 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice, and appoint them a king.” So Samuel said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.”

The nation Israel wants a king, and with it Samuel warns that they will get big government with a very large price tag. This does not matter. The people are determined to have their king. The people (not just the elders) refuse to listen to Samuel or heed his warnings. They insist on having their king, but now they are more honest as to what they expect the king to do for them. They want a king to judge them and go before them in battle. In truth, they want a king to do their judging and their fighting for them.

Samuel listens to all the people have to say, and then he goes to the LORD to repeat all these words to Him (verse 21). This is a most interesting statement. We are not at all surprised to read that Samuel goes to the people telling them all that the LORD has said to him (verse 10). But why does Samuel feel it necessary to tell God *all* that the people say to him? Does God not hear what the people are saying? Of course He does. Why do we need to pray, since God already knows our needs (see Matthew 6:32)? It is not that God needs to hear us so that He can be informed; it is that we need God. We need to share our burdens with Him. Samuel tells God everything the people say, not because God needs to be informed, but because Samuel needs intimacy with God.

In answer to Samuel's prayer, God once again instructs him to give the people what they demand. And so, not knowing who this king will be, Samuel sends the Israelites to their homes until the time when God will indicate the identity of their new king (verse 22).

Conclusion

I have strongly emphasized the evil and folly of Israel's demand to have a king. Some may wish to protest by pointing to the text in Deuteronomy 17. Didn't God say it would be all right for Israel to have a king? If it was prophesied that

the Israelites would demand a king, then why does God come down so hard on them when they do so? Let us take a look at this text in Deuteronomy:

14 “When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' 15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, *one* from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. 16 “Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' 17 “Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. 18 “Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 “And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

This text is a prophecy, and we can see that it is exactly fulfilled when the Israelites demanded a king, just like the nations. The fact that something is prophesied is not proof that what is foretold is something good and righteous. The betrayal of Judas is foretold, as well as Israel’s rejection of her Messiah. This does not mean that Judas, or the unbelieving Israelites, were right to do what they did. It only means that God wants us to know it was a part of His eternal plan.

I suggest that while God foretells the events described in 1 Samuel 8 in Deuteronomy, there is much more than a prophecy here. If Deuteronomy 17:14 is a prophecy of Israel’s demand for a king, the remaining verses in the chapter are God’s instructions, intended to prevent this king from being like the kings of the nations. The instructions God sets down through Moses are what makes His king distinct from the nations.

The king must be an Israelite. The king is not to be popularly chosen but divinely designated and installed. God’s king must not multiply horses or wives. This is what pagan kings do because it gives them military and political power. God’s king is not to trust in his own resources, his own strength, but in God. I believe this is the reason David’s numbering of the Israelite troops is so evil and

results in such severe discipline (see 1 Chronicles 21). David appears to be puffed up with pride and numbering his troops gives him a sense of power. So God deals severely with him and his people for this sin. The king must not be intent upon amassing wealth and riches, for here too is power. The king is to trust and obey God and challenge the nation Israel to do likewise.

David is this kind of king as he stands before Goliath, but years of power and prosperity bring many trials into David's life. In the final analysis, Israel's finest kings fall far short of the standards set down by God in Deuteronomy 17. The failure of both David and Solomon in these areas is self-evident. *In the end, there is only one person who has ever met these qualifications, our Lord Jesus Christ.* He was rich, but He became poor on our behalf. He did not have or employ earthly power to establish His kingdom. He certainly did not multiply military might or wives. *And so it is that Christ and Christ alone is fit to be God's King, to reign on the earth forever and ever.*

11 And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." 14 And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped (Revelation 5:11-14).

The main lesson this text teaches us is what might be called "the economics of sin." If I am right in my assessment of this text, the major emphasis falls upon the high cost of kingship, especially when compared to the minimal price of rule by judges. It is true that the Israelites are wrong in demanding a king because they really want to replace God with a human idol. But setting aside the moral and biblical problems associated with their demand for a king, there is also a very clear economic problem. In the simplest of terms, being ruled by a king is not worth the price.

Recently I was with my wife Jeannette in Des Moines, Iowa, at a state celebration on the capital grounds. We were with our friend, Brenda Smith, who reminded me of a statement I made years ago while at Six Flags (an entertainment park near Dallas, Texas). When considering the long wait and the price we paid for our tickets, I remarked to those friends with us, "This ride is just like sin . . . the price is high and the ride is short!" That is exactly the way

Samuel wants the Israelites to think about having a king. The price is going to be very high.

The Israelites do not see it this way, because they are more than willing to pay the price Samuel spells out. I think I can understand why. The price for being subject to their surrounding enemies is very high, as we see from Judges 6:

1 Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. 2 And the power of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which were in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds. 3 For it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites would come up with the Amalekites and the sons of the east and go against them. 4 So they would camp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. 5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, they would come in like locusts for number, both they and their camels were innumerable; and they came into the land to devastate it. 6 So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD (Judges 6:1-6).

To the Israelites, the price they will pay for their king is judged as far less than they will pay for being subject to other nations. What they do not understand is that God will protect them at no cost, if they simply repent of their sins, cry out for deliverance, and serve Him with their whole heart. I fear this is the price they consider to be too high. They do not want to give up their foreign deities. They do not want to serve God alone. They do not want God as their King. And so they seek to replace both God and Samuel by having a king like the nations.

In discussing this text, a friend of mine remarked something like this: “If you’re shopping for a god, 10% isn’t a bad price.” He’s right. If you get a real “God” out of the deal, it would be a bargain. The simple fact is that when Israel pays the high price for a king, they really get very little in return. The Israelites assume that their king will make their decisions (judgments) for them, tell them what to do, and fight their battles for them. A review of Deuteronomy 28-32 should remind the Israelites that it is not their king who brings them peace and prosperity; it is their God. It is not their king who is worthy of their faith and trust and obedience (alone); it is God. They look to a king to do for them what only God can do, with or without a king. They are willing to pay a high price for something which is not really worth it.

Sin is like this, and Satan always seeks to sell us on sin in a way that makes a crooked used car salesman weep with envy. Satan always seeks to maximize our estimation of the benefits of sin, and just as busily engages in attempting to

convince us that the price of sin is minimal. In the Garden of Eden, Satan deceived Eve into believing that she could actually become like God, and that partaking of the forbidden fruit would not really result in death. When we choose sin, we do so believing Satan's lie. We think we can "use" sin, while retaining full control over it. The reality is that sin quickly gains control over us, and we become its slaves. Whenever we are tempted and contemplate choosing the path of sin, let us remember what the Bible teaches us about the economics of sin: the price is too high, and the ride is all too short. Sin does not pay.

Why then, even after Samuel warns the Israelites about the high cost of kingship, do the Israelites reject his warning and demand to have their king? Why are men willing to pay such a high price for so little? I think I know the answer, and I believe it is clearly implied in our text. *Men loathe grace*. It is detestable and loathsome, because it is charity. Grace does not bolster our pride; it produces humility. When we pay for something (by works or money), we think we own it. We think that when we pay for something we are in control. When we receive grace, we are not in control. God is in control. Grace is sovereignly bestowed, and so we cannot dictate how and when God will grant it to us; we cannot control its benefits. But good old fashioned work (we falsely suppose) obliges God to bless us. When we do the right things, God must respond predictably. We are in control. God becomes our servant. And so men would rather pay – and pay greatly – to maintain their pride and sense of control. This is why men prefer idols to God, even if they have to carry them. They believe that serving idols keeps them in control of their "god." How foolish.

I find it interesting that the Israelites want a man to make their god. It will never work, and the price for trying will be great. God's way is to make God a man, a God-man, to save man from his sins and to rule over the earth as God's King, the promised Messiah. *This promised King who was prophesied to be both God and man is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ*.

We should learn one last lesson from this text: God sometimes gives us the thing we want and even demand, even though it will prove to be painful to us. I am reminded of that passage in the Psalms which speaks of the Israelites' complaining because they have no meat, prompting God to give them their bellies full. It goes this way:

15 So He gave them their request, But sent a wasting disease among them (Psalm 106:15, NASB).

15 And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul (KJV).

There is a persistence in prayer and petition which is not an evidence of faith, but evidence of lustful greed. There is a perseverance in prayer which is not pious at all. It is possible that if we persist in asking for that which is not best, God may give it to us. It will be painful if this happens, but in giving us what we so desperately want, God disciplines us so that we learn to leave these things in His hands. In biblical terms, *we must focus on seeking God first, and trust Him to add all those things He deems best for us* (see Matthew 6:33). Let us be cautious that our requests to God are not demands. Let us learn from the Israelites of old so that we need not walk the path they had to walk.

9-11. Saul and his anointing

9:1-10:16. Saul's anointing

10:17-27. Saul's fair beginning

11:1-15. Saul's initial victories

1 Samuel 9:1-11:13

Samuel Gets the Message: Saul Will Be Israel's King

(9:1-17)

1 Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valour. 2 And he had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome *man*, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people. 3 Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to his son Saul, "Take now with you one of the servants, and arise, go search for the donkeys." 4 And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find *them*. Then they passed through the land of Shaalim, but *they were* not *there*. Then he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they did not find *them*. 5 When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, and let us return, lest my father cease *to be concerned* about the donkeys and become anxious for us." 6 And he said to him, "Behold now, there is a man of God in this city, and the man is held in honour; all that he says surely comes true. Now let us go there, perhaps he can tell us about our journey on which we have set out." 7 Then Saul said to his servant, "But behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? For the bread is gone from our sack and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?" 8 And the servant answered Saul again and said, "Behold, I have

in my hand a fourth of a shekel of silver; I will give *it* to the man of God and he will tell us our way.” 9 (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he used to say, “Come, and let us go to the seer”; for *he who is called* a prophet now was formerly called a seer.) 10 Then Saul said to his servant, “Well said; come, let us go.” So they went to the city where the man of God was. 11 As they went up the slope to the city, they found young women going out to draw water, and said to them, “Is the seer here?” 12 And they answered them and said, “He is; see, *he is* ahead of you. Hurry now, for he has come into the city today, for the people have a sacrifice on the high place today. 13 “As soon as you enter the city you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat, for the people will not eat until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now therefore, go up for you will find him at once.” 14 So they went up to the city. As they came into the city, behold, Samuel was coming out toward them to go up to the high place. 15 Now a day before Saul's coming, the LORD had revealed *this* to Samuel saying, 16 “About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he shall deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me.” 17 When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said to him, “Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people.”

While the events of this text are for the benefit of Saul and all Israel, their primary benefit is for Samuel. After all, at God's instruction Samuel has promised Israel a king, and now he must discern just who that king might be. The events of our text bring Saul into contact with Samuel in a way which makes this prophet certain that Saul is God's choice for Israel's king.

Saul's father, Kish, is a Benjamite of some reputation. Our text informs us that he is a **“mighty man of valour”** (9:1). This expression can be understood to refer to a man's courage, his military skill and success, or even his wealth. He is, for one reason or many, a man of renown. Saul comes from good stock. And while Saul has not yet established a reputation for himself, he has all the physical attributes which will stand him in good stead with the people. In short, he is what our teenage daughters would call a “hunk.” He is tall (taller than any other Israelite), dark (people in that part of the world usually are – and since he works out in the fields, he would have an awesome tan), and handsome. It will take much more than this, however, for Saul to fulfil his calling as king.

And so it is that some of the livestock of Kish become lost. We do not know how the donkeys got loose, but somehow they wander off from the farm of Kish. Kish sends his son, Saul, after the lost animals, instructing him to take along one

of the servants to help. These two set out on an unsuccessful search, as far as the lost donkeys are concerned, but one which proves to be otherwise fruitful. These two men cover a lot of ground in the next three days, but they do not find the lost donkeys. Saul is ready to throw in the towel and give it all up. Surely his father will begin to worry more about them than the donkeys.

Saul's young servant is not so sure. He knows that they have come very near to the place where **"a man of God"** lives. It seems that neither the servant nor Saul know this **"man of God"** by name, and that the servant knows much more about him than Saul does. This **"man of God"** is a **"seer,"** a name formerly used to designate a prophet.³¹ The servant knows Samuel by reputation, if not by name. He is a highly esteemed man, whose words always come true – a true prophet. Perhaps they can ask this man about their journey and learn the whereabouts of their lost donkeys.

Saul seems to like the idea, but he does raise a very practical problem – they have nothing to give the seer. Their resources are completely depleted. They have used up all their supplies and do not even have bread to eat. How can they ask for his services with nothing to give in return? The servant has a solution for this problem, too. He has a silver coin which will suffice. With this encouragement, Saul consents to seek the help of the **"man of God,"** completely oblivious, it seems, as to who he is or to what this might lead.

As Saul and his servant reach the outside of town, they meet some young women on their way to draw water and ask if the seer is there. They tell the men that indeed he is there, and if they hurry, they might catch him while he is still available. He is about to bless a sacrifice and then celebrate the meal with a few invited guests. Once all this begins, Saul and his servant will have to wait for some time, since they are not invited guests and would not dare interrupt the sacrifice and celebration. This is just the right moment, but they must hurry.³²

Saul and his servant continue upward, toward the city. As they approach the city, Samuel sees them coming. It is at this point that we find another parenthesis, described to us in verses 15 and 16. From a purely human point of view, Saul's arrival is unlikely (they have wandered about, unsuccessful in finding the lost animals, and now they are out of food and eager to go home). From the young women's point of view, they are lucky. From a divine point of view they are expected, as we shall see. The day before, God has spoken to Samuel, indicating that he will meet the new king the following day. He is going to be a Benjamite, and he is to be anointed by Samuel. This king is the gracious gift of a compassionate God, who has heard the cries of His people and is raising up this man to deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. When Samuel looks up and sees Saul and his servant arriving at the city, God tells him that this is the

man. Samuel thus knows the one coming toward him is God's choice for Israel's king.

Saul is Informed and Transformed

(9:17—10:9)

9:17 When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said to him, "Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people." 18 Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate, and said, "Please tell me where the seer's house is." 19 And Samuel answered Saul and said, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today; and in the morning I will let you go, and will tell you all that is on your mind. 20 "And as for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's household?" 21 And Saul answered and said, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way?" 22 Then Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall, and gave them a place at the head of those who were invited, who were about thirty men. 23 And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion that I gave you, concerning which I said to you, 'Set it aside.'" 24 Then the cook took up the leg with what was on it and set *it* before Saul. And *Samuel* said, "Here is what has been reserved! Set *it* before you *and* eat, because it has been kept for you until the appointed time, since I said I have invited the people." So Saul ate with Samuel that day. 25 When they came down from the high place into the city, *Samuel* spoke with Saul on the roof. 26 And they arose early; and it came about at daybreak that Samuel called to Saul on the roof, saying, "Get up, that I may send you away." So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street. 27 As they were going down to the edge of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Say to the servant that he might go ahead of us and pass on, but you remain standing now, that I may proclaim the word of God to you."

10:1 Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said, "Has not the LORD anointed you a ruler over His inheritance? 2 "When you go from me today, then you will find two men close to Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, 'The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. Now behold, your father has ceased to be concerned about the donkeys and is anxious for you, saying,' What shall I do about my son? " 3 "Then you will go on further from there, and you will come as far as the oak of Tabor, and there three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you, one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another

carrying a jug of wine; 4 and they will greet you and give you two *loaves* of bread, which you will accept from their hand. 5 “Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying. 6 “Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. 7 “And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you. 8 “And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do.” 9 Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. 10 When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them. 11 And it came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, “What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?” 12 And a man there answered and said, “Now, who is their father?” Therefore it became a proverb: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” 13 When he had finished prophesying, he came to the high place. 14 Now Saul's uncle said to him and his servant, “Where did you go?” And he said, “To look for the donkeys. When we saw that they could not be found, we went to Samuel.” 15 And Saul's uncle said, “Please tell me what Samuel said to you.” 16 So Saul said to his uncle, “He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found.” But he did not tell him about the matter of the kingdom which Samuel had mentioned.

While Samuel knows that Saul is God’s choice for Israel’s king, Saul has no such knowledge. The next section is largely devoted to the process God uses to inform and transform Saul as the new king. That Saul does not previously know Samuel is apparent from our text. When he arrives at the entrance to the city, Saul turns to the first person he sees to ask directions to the “seer’s” house. Samuel is the one Saul asks for directions. Samuel informs Saul that he *is* the seer. Before Saul can blurt out his request, Samuel speaks words Saul never dreamed he would hear. Samuel instructs Saul to go up ahead of him to the high place, where the sacrifice and the sacrificial meal are about to be eaten. Saul is to eat with Samuel that day and then spend the night. The next morning, Samuel will tell him “all that was on his mind” and then send him on his way. Having said this, Samuel goes on to say something which must amaze Saul:

“And as for your donkeys which were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s household?” (9:20).

Saul does not even have to ask the question, because Samuel already knows what he wants to know. Without Saul ever asking, Samuel tells him what is missing, how long they have been missing, and that they have been found. If this amazes Saul, more amazement is still to come. Samuel has told Saul he will tell him all that is on his mind . . . the next day (see verse 19). If this matter of the lost donkeys is not to be on his mind, then what is? I believe it is the things Samuel says next to Saul in verse 20: **“And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s household.”** The words Saul speaks to Samuel in response, recorded in verse 21, are the essence of what Saul will now have on his mind, since the matter of the donkeys has been settled. What can the words of Samuel possibly mean? And why does Samuel speak them to Saul? How can this be, since he is not from a prominent tribe or from the most prominent family? This, I believe, is what Samuel plants in Saul’s mind, and what he will explain more fully the next morning. And so it will be.

Samuel, Saul, and his servant make their way up to the high place, where he gives them the place of honour at the head of all the invited guests.³³ Samuel is a man of faith. When God informs him that the king will come on the following day (9:16), Samuel makes reservations for him as the honoured guest of the sacrificial meal (9:23-24). He has the cook set apart the choicest portion, telling him to serve it when instructed to do so (when the promised king appears). When Saul and his servant are seated, Samuel instructs the cook to bring out the portion which has been set aside in expectation of his arrival. The man who appears to be an unexpected drop-in is in fact, expected and none other than the guest of honour.

There is a further conversation between Samuel and Saul on the roof before Saul settles down for the night. Early the next morning, Samuel awakens Saul to send him on his way privately before the people are up and about and watching him with great curiosity and interest. As they are leaving town, Samuel instructs Saul to send his servant on ahead so that he can speak privately with him. When he does so, Samuel takes his flask of oil and anoints Saul’s head, kissing him, and informing him that God has indeed chosen him to be ruler over all Israel.

No doubt, this is a bomb shell for Saul. From the events of the previous day and the mysterious statements Samuel has made to Saul, it is evident that Samuel might be speaking of Saul as the coming king. But now there is no possibility for misunderstanding. Samuel’s words and actions (the anointing) make it very

clear that Saul has been appointed and anointed to be the king. But Saul is a man who needs some convincing (see 10:22). So Samuel prophesies regarding the events which will happen in the next few hours. First, on the road to Rachel's tomb they will meet two men, who will inform them of what Samuel has already told them, namely that the lost donkeys have been found, and Saul's father is now worried about his son.

Further on, when they reach the "oak of Tabor," they will encounter three men going up to worship God at Bethel. One man will have three kids, another three loaves of bread, and the third will have a jug of wine. These three will not only greet Saul and his servant, they will give them two loaves of bread which they are to take. This bread will serve as their provisions for the rest of their way home.

Verses 14-16 of chapter 10 are a part of the private confirmation to Saul of God's choice of him as Israel's king. The writer describes the events following Saul's meeting with Samuel in chronological order, and so Saul's arrival home, and his interaction with his uncle, come after his becoming one of the prophets for a time (verses 10-13). But from the flow of the argument, the conversation with Saul's uncle is a part of Saul's private confirmation.

When Saul arrives home, his uncle is there to greet him and question him about what he has been doing over the days he has been gone. Saul gives only sketchy facts, so that the matter of his anointing will not be raised or discussed. Saul's silence may have only spurred his uncle on, because he certainly is interested in what happened, especially once he learns that Saul has met with Samuel. Saul is only willing to tell him the part about the donkeys, and so it will have to be Samuel who publicly introduces Saul as Israel's king, which happens in the next section.

The King is Introduced to Israel

(10:10—11:13)

10:10 When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them. 11 And it came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" 12 And a man there answered and said, "Now, who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" 13 When he had finished prophesying, he came to the high place. 14 Now Saul's uncle said to him and his servant, "Where did you go?" And he said, "To look for the donkeys. When we saw that they could

not be found, we went to Samuel. “ 15 And Saul's uncle said, “Please tell me what Samuel said to you.” 16 So Saul said to his uncle, “He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found.” But he did not tell him about the matter of the kingdom which Samuel had mentioned. 17 Thereafter Samuel called the people together to the LORD at Mizpah; 18 and he said to the sons of Israel, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians, and from the power of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.' 19 “But you today rejected your God, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, 'No, but set a king over us!' Now therefore, present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans.” 20 Thus Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. 21 Then he brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the Matrite family was taken. And Saul the son of Kish was taken; but when they looked for him, he could not be found. 22 Therefore they inquired further of the LORD, “Has the man come here yet?” So the LORD said, “Behold, he is hiding himself by the baggage.” 23 So they ran and took him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. 24 And Samuel said to all the people, “Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people.” So all the people shouted and said, “*Long* live the king!” 25 Then Samuel told the people the ordinances of the kingdom, and wrote *them* in the book and placed *it* before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his house. 26 And Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant *men* whose hearts God had touched went with him. 27 But certain worthless men said, “How can this one deliver us?” And they despised him and did not bring him any present. But he kept silent.

11:1 Now Nahash the Ammonite came up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a covenant with us and we will serve you.” 2 But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “I will make *it* with you on this condition, that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you, thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel.” 3 And the elders of Jabesh said to him, “Let us alone for seven days, that we may send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to deliver us, we will come out to you.” 4 Then the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and spoke these words in the hearing of the people, and all the people lifted up their voices and wept. 5 Now behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen; and he said, “What is *the matter* with the people that they weep?” So they related to him the words of the men of Jabesh. 6 Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when

he heard these words, and he became very angry. 7 And he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent *them* throughout the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, “Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen.” Then the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man. 8 And he numbered them in Bezek; and the sons of Israel were 300,000, and the men of Judah 30,000. 9 And they said to the messengers who had come, “Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh-gilead, 'Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have deliverance.'” So the messengers went and told the men of Jabesh; and they were glad. 10 Then the men of Jabesh said, “Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do to us whatever seems good to you.” 11 And it happened the next morning that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp at the morning watch, and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it came about that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. 12 Then the people said to Samuel, “Who is he that said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death.” 13 But Saul said, “Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished deliverance in Israel.”

Finally, Saul and his servant reach the “hill of God,” where the Philistine garrison is stationed,^a and where the third sign takes place. The third sign is different from the first two in at least two regards. *First*, the third sign is publicly witnessed and at least partially grasped as significant. We are informed of the prophecy Samuel gave to Saul regarding the two men he would meet and later on the three men on their way to Bethel, but we are not given a full account of how these things take place. We are only given the general statement that **“all these signs came about on that day”** (10:9). But when it comes to the third prophecy – the one which tells of the Spirit coming upon Saul – we are given an account which includes the impact this has on the nation. The first two signs are almost entirely for the benefit of Saul alone. He alone has been told these things will happen. Anyone watching the fulfilment of these two prophecies would not discern that these are signs, for they would be unaware of their detailed prediction. But this third sign is one which catches people’s attention, so much so that it becomes proverbial.

Second, what happens to Saul on the “hill of God” is not normal; it is supernatural. The Spirit of God comes upon Saul and he prophesies, along with those who are known to be prophets. There is no question on the part of those who witness this amazing incident – Saul is among the prophets. So why is this important? It is important because this is a public demonstration that God has

empowered Saul to judge the nation. In Exodus 18, Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, counsels him to distribute the work load of judging the nation. The appointment of these 70 judges is described in Numbers 11, where all 70 of them prophesy before the eyes of the nation, demonstrating that the Spirit of God is upon them, empowering them to serve as judges. The same thing is now happening to Saul. The Spirit of God has come upon him, empowering him to judge the nation as their king. This event is clearly supernatural, and it is done in public. In fact, the change in Saul becomes proverbial, so that even those who do not witness this sign hear of it. This is the first public indication that Saul is to be Israel's king.

The next indication will be very public. Samuel calls all of Israel to Mizpah (the place where they repented and turned to God at the beginning of Samuel's ministry – see chapter 7), where he confronts a very eager audience. In all their enthusiasm and optimism of what is to come, Samuel once again reminds the Israelites that their demand for a king is a manifestation of disobedience and unbelief. Samuel indicates that it was then (in chapter 8), and still is to this very day, a rejection of God. This God, whom they will replace with a human king, is the One who delivers them from all their difficulties. It is not their new king who will deliver them, because it has always been God who delivered them, and who will continue to do so. In spite of Israel's sin, God is about to graciously give them the king they are demanding.

The king, as seen in Deuteronomy 17:15, is to be the man of God's choosing, and this choice will be indicated by the casting of the lot. It is first narrowed down to the line of Benjamin and then finally to Saul, the very one whom God has already indicated to Samuel earlier, the one whom Samuel has already anointed as king. But this process is for the benefit of the people of the nation, so that they will be convinced that Samuel is God's choice.

When Saul is indicated by the casting of the lots, he is nowhere to be found. No one seems to know him or his whereabouts. It is by further inquiry of the Lord that He indicates Saul is hiding by the baggage. The people run to the luggage, find Saul, and bring him to Samuel. When the people look upon Saul, they are greatly impressed. Here is a man whom we have already learned is very handsome (9:2), and we are told once again that he is taller than any other Israelite. In effect, Saul is the "Goliath" of Israel, a giant of a man, and an extremely handsome man at that. From a merely physical perspective, Saul is first class material.

Samuel points out to the people what an extremely pleasing choice God has made. God makes and gives no "junk." Saul is a magnificent specimen of humanity. No one could have asked for more. And so the people begin to shout,

“Long live the king!” (verse 24). At this time, Samuel spells out all of the ordinances which pertain to kingly rule, writing this on a book which he places before the Lord. And then he sends the people home.

Saul likewise goes to his house, accompanied by a group of valiant men whose hearts God has touched. These men seem to be something like Saul’s “secret service,” accompanying him wherever he goes, protecting him from any who might wish to harm him. These valiant men are further evidence that Saul is indeed God’s choice for Israel’s king.

Not all the people see it this way, however, for our text informs us there is a group of men – worthless fellows – who do not look upon Saul as their deliverer. Do these men know the “old Saul” too well? Do they disdain the man for hiding amongst the luggage? Is he not their kind of leader? We really don’t know why they look down upon Saul, but their most serious sin is to doubt and dispute God’s choice of their king. While all the others have gifts for Saul, these worthless fellows do not. Their disdain for Saul is obvious. Nevertheless, Saul chooses to remain silent and do nothing about them for the moment. They will appear again in our text, however.

What the Israelites really want is a king who will deliver them from their enemies. They want a king who will go before them into war (8:19-20). And specifically, they want a king who will deal with Nahash, the king of the Ammonites (12:12). The proof of Saul’s kingship will be clinched if Saul can successfully lead them into war. Chapter 11 is all about just this.

Nahash, the Ammonite king, has besieged the Israelite town of Jabesh-gilead. The people are about to give up and ask Nahash to declare what his terms for peace are. The people of Jabesh-gilead are willing to be his subjects; they really seem to have no choice. But the king’s terms for peace are severe. He not only wants the Israelite town to surrender to him, he insists that he will pluck out the right eye of each. This will do at least two things: (1) It will humiliate the Israelites, and (2) it will disable them so that they will fight with great difficulty. (Have you ever tried to sight a gun or aim a bow and arrow without your right eye?)

The people of Jabesh ask Nahash for seven days to plea to their Jewish brethren for help. If no one comes to their aid, they promise, they will become his subjects. Messengers are sent throughout the land of Israel, pleading for help. It seems as though nothing is being done, and that no one intends to get involved. But word eventually comes to Gibeah of Saul, and when it does, the people of that city begin to weep. Saul is coming in from the fields and observes the weeping and asks what has happened. When he is told, he is furious.^s He slaughters a yoke of oxen (was it his oxen or those of an unconcerned

spectator?), cuts them into pieces and sends these pieces around the land, warning that anyone who refuses to assemble for war will find his oxen slaughtered also. It seems as though some are excusing themselves from coming to the aid of their brethren because they cannot get away from the farm at the moment. Saul's actions make it clear that they will have nothing to farm with if they refuse to help their brethren. He threatens to take away the equivalent of their "tractors."

A grand total of 330,000 soldiers assemble, 30,000 of them men of Judah. Word is sent to the people of Jabesh, assuring them that help is on the way. The men of Jabesh inform Nahash that on the following day they will **"come out"** to him. Nahash thinks this means that they intend to surrender. The people of Jabesh hope it means they will **"come out"** fighting. And so when their Israelite brethren attack the Ammonites the next day, they do come out fighting, and the result is a crushing defeat for the Ammonites. As the text indicates, "no two of them were left together" (verse 11).

Saul is an instant hero. It is one thing for Saul to be **"among the prophets;"** it is still another for him to be chosen king by lot. But when Saul is the one man who can assemble the whole nation and then defeat the Ammonites, this is all the proof the people need or want. "And now," the people ask, "who are those naysayers, who spoke of their king with disdain?" Let these fellows be brought forward and dealt with!

Saul's finest moment is not in assembling the nation for war nor in winning a stunning victory over the Ammonites. His finest moment is in dealing with some of his own people, who have spoken against him. Saul can take his revenge, and in so doing, bring great pleasure to the people, as well as to himself. But Saul refuses to dampen the spirit of the day with such action. Most of all, Saul is unwilling to take credit for the victory which has just been won over the Ammonites. It is the Lord who **"has accomplished deliverance in Israel"** (verse 13), and thus Saul will not raise a hand against those who disdain him. Truly Israel does have their king, and a good one at that.

Conclusion

This last observation is probably the most unexpected, namely that Saul is a good king. Unfortunately, I have previously considered Saul only in retrospect. I could never look at Saul without first thinking of David. And when I thought of Saul in the light of David, Saul always came out second, and with good reason. In addition, I have discovered that I am guilty of viewing Saul's commencement as Israel's king only in the light of his latter days, days which put him in a very poor light.

But if we take this text as it stands, we must look at Saul differently here in the light of the following facts. (1) Saul is a gracious gift of God to His people, in spite of their sinful demand to have a king. God gives Saul to Israel as her king out of mercy and compassion, because He has noted the nation's calamities and distresses, and has sent Saul to deliver His people, just as He has done since the exodus (9:16; 10:18). (2) Saul is not given to Israel because God wants this man to fail, and therefore picks the worst possible specimen of humanity to give the nation as their king. God picks a physically superior man, whose appearance and stature seem to perfectly suit the task he is being given. (3) God supernaturally empowers Saul, putting his Spirit on him to enable him to judge and to lead with wisdom and power. Whatever weaknesses Saul has as a man, God deals with supernaturally, so that he became **"another man"** (see 10:6, 9). (4) And finally, God identifies Saul in such a way that no one but a worthless fool would deny that he is the appointed king.

God is not trying to sabotage the reign of Saul, though He surely knows his kingdom will fail. The failures of Saul are not due to God's undermining, but to Saul's personal failure to walk in the ways of God, in his failure to trust and obey God. Saul fails to appropriate the resources God has graciously given him to enable him to rule in justice and righteousness. Saul is not a second-class king, given by a spiteful God; he is a first-class king, completely equipped for his task, and wholly responsible for his failure. This king is not a David, to be sure, but neither is he a dud. For me, this is a new thought, but one which our text teaches.

How gracious God is to us, in spite of our sin. God gives Israel a king, but this king is not **"like the king of the nations."** This king is the finest humanity available, a man transformed in heart and supernaturally empowered by the Spirit of God. When Saul walks in the Spirit, he functions as the deliverer of the people of God. When he walks in the Spirit, he recognizes that the victories his armies win are God's victories, not his own. He is a man marked by humility and grace. This will change, all too quickly. Even though we know this change will come, let us see what a magnificent king he is, at least for a short time.

The military victory in which Saul leads the Israelites (chapter 11) is not due to Israel's having a king nor to any merit on Israel's part, but solely due to the mercy and grace of God, who hears the cries of His people and once again comes to their rescue. The Israelites quickly embrace this new king. He is the kind of king they want. When Jesus comes as the **"King of Israel,"** He is no Saul. He does not have a striking appearance, which attracts men, and He is not enthusiastically embraced as God's Son:

1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him (Isaiah 53:1-3).

His followers, and even His closest disciples, want Jesus to be a king like Saul, but Jesus refuses. He does not come to cast off Roman rule, but to give His life as a ransom for many. He comes to a sinful world, and bears the penalty of wicked men, so that they might have their sins forgiven and become the sons of God. This is the kind of king many reject today. They would like a king who is more like Saul. Saul is God's first king, and in the beginning he is a good king. *But there is really only one great king, and this is Jesus, the King of the Jews, who came to earth as a man (without putting off His deity), lived a sinless life, and then was crucified for the sins of men, and raised from the dead on the third day.* This is the same "King" who will come again, and this time, all will recognize Him, and every knee will bow to Him. He will subdue all of His enemies and then rule over the earth in perfect righteousness. *This is the King for whom we are waiting.*

Finally, this text is a fascinating passage as it relates to knowing the will of God. God has revealed through Samuel the prophet that He will give Israel a king (1 Samuel 8). He then providentially (circumstantially) leads Saul and his servant to the very place where Samuel will be, and to the feast at which Saul is the unknown (by name), but expected, invited guest of honor. God directly reveals to Samuel that the king is coming the next day. When Samuel first sees Saul, God tells him that this is the promised guest, who is to be Israel's king. And then by means of supernatural signs, and by the casting of lots, and by a spectacular military victory, He indicates to Saul and to the nation Israel that this man is to be their king.

We do not see Saul seeking the kingdom nor even seeking God out in prayer. Saul is willing to seek out Samuel for divine guidance to find his donkeys, but only after his servant suggests the idea and then offers to pay for it. Saul is designated as Israel's king as he goes about the everyday business of life. Who would ever think that this man would set out to find donkeys and end up being anointed as Israel's king?

It seems as though Samuel also obtains divine guidance as he goes about the normal course of his life and ministry. Samuel is continuing to minister, just as he always has done, when God tells him that the king will be coming the

following day. Samuel learns God's will concerning Israel's king as he faithfully carries out his duties as one of Israel's prophets and judges. God has a way of making His will clear to us, when it is necessary for us to know it. He does not try to hide His will from us, and when He is intent on revealing it, we cannot miss it. God's will is not a secret, which takes a special technique to discern.

As you get up tomorrow morning, think of this text and what it implies. What irksome task will come your way? Will it be searching for lost donkeys? Probably not, but there will be those mundane and even irritating tasks which seem to consume your life with little apparent significance. God has a way of using such irksome tasks as the means to much greater ends.

Israel eagerly awaits the coming of her king. Every action, every word of Samuel is viewed with great expectation and interest. If these ancient Israelites so eagerly await their first king, *how much more eager should we be for the coming of the King of Kings, our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we begin every day wondering if this is the day? Are we faithfully going about our duties, eager to please the King when He comes?* Let us commence every day with a sense of eager anticipation, knowing that the coming of our King may be today.

12. Samuel's farewell address

Verses 1-15. Samuel officially proclaims the kingdom.

Verses 16-25. The Lord's sign of Israel's sin in asking for a king.

1 Samuel 11:14-12:25

Samuel's Innocence and Israel's Guilt (12:1-5)

1 Then Samuel said to all Israel, "Behold, I have listened to your voice in all that you said to me, and I have appointed a king over you. 2 "And now, here is the king walking before you, but I am old and gray, and behold my sons are with you. And I have walked before you from my youth even to this day. 3 "Here I am; bear witness against me before the LORD and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore *it* to you." 4 And they said, "You have not defrauded us, or oppressed us, or taken anything from any man's hand." 5 And he said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day that you have found nothing in my hand." And they said, "*He is witness.*"

In this paragraph, Samuel places placing himself on trial before God and all the people. It is based, I believe, on Israel's implied or stated charges against Samuel in chapter 8, which the people consider compelling reason for Samuel's replacement by a king. Rather than tiptoe around these charges, Samuel brings them out into the open, publicly challenging anyone to successfully accuse him of wrong doing, especially in relation to his official duties.

Several allegations are made in chapter 8, all of which Samuel confronts in our text. The *first* thing Samuel says to the people is that he listened to them and granted them that for which they asked. Don't expect this from a king. Samuel has not been insensitive to their desires, nor has he been unresponsive. *Second*, he calls attention to his age, telling them he is "**old and gray.**" In chapter 8 they implied he was too old to carry out his task of judging the nation. What a foolish conclusion the Israelites reached. Is age somehow incompatible with the ability to judge with wisdom? Look at the Supreme Court of our nation. Is it best to have a court filled with young people fresh out of high school or college, or people who have been seasoned by years of experience? Samuel is not too old to carry out his calling as a judge. He will continue to serve this people well for some time. He is not "over the hill."

Samuel's ministry is a public one, and his sons are there with the Israelites. His integrity and generosity should be apparent, as should be his failures. In chapter 8, the Israelites draw attention to the conduct of Samuel's sons. They accuse them of not "walking in Samuel's ways" (see 8:5), and these accusations against his sons are true (see 8:1-3). The question is whether Samuel dealt with his sons as he should. Every indication is that he is without fault in this matter, unlike his predecessor, Eli.

If Samuel is not at fault with regard to his family, is he at fault with regard to his ministry? Does Samuel in any way fail at his job so that the Israelites can call for his resignation and replacement by a king? The answer is a very clear, "No!" Samuel maintains his innocence and integrity in ministry in three statements. *First*, Samuel does not defraud anyone. He has not judged unjustly so that people are defrauded of anything due to a twisting or abuse of the judicial process. *Second*, unlike his sons, Samuel has not taken bribes to distort justice in his judgments (see 8:3). *Third*, Samuel asserts that he has not oppressed anyone. He has not abused his position of power so as to lord it over those he judges. He is a "servant," not a "master." *Finally*, Samuel has not "taken anyone's ox or donkey." I do not think Samuel is talking about theft here. I think he means he has not taken oxen or donkeys as their kings will do:

16 “He will also take your male servants and your female servants and your best young men and your donkeys, and use them for his work” (1 Samuel 8:16).

Like the apostle Paul, Samuel does not charge for his ministry. He certainly lives from his portion of the sacrifices, but he does not charge a high price for his ministry. His services are most certainly not as expensive as the services of the king will be.

If Samuel is found “not guilty” of all the charges the Israelites have made against him, then by inference Israel must be guilty of having falsely made these charges. These first five verses of chapter 12 demonstrate that Samuel is qualified to judge Israel and therefore qualified to prosecute God’s case against them in the following verses. Samuel is innocent, and thus Israel wrongly seeks his removal. Samuel is innocent and therefore able to call this wayward nation to account for its sin of rejecting him and God.

A Lesson From Israel’s History

(12:6-11)

6 Then Samuel said to the people, “It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. 7 “So now, take your stand, that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did for you and your fathers. 8 “When Jacob went into Egypt and your fathers cried out to the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt and settled them in this place. 9 “But they forgot the LORD their God, so He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. 10 “And they cried out to the LORD and said, ‘We have sinned because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroath; but now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve Thee.’ 11 “Then the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security.

Here we see another case of “historical thinking” in the Bible. Samuel takes the Israelites back to the beginning of the “**kingdom,**” which God established at the exodus, and briefly traces their history to the present. His goal is to prove to them that their present demand to have a king like the rest of the nations is but one more instance of their rebellion against God -- like the rebellion which characterized their forefathers.

Israel's history as a kingdom begins at the exodus. The first thing Samuel emphasizes to the Israelites of his day is that, ultimately, it was not Moses and Aaron who delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage -- it was God (verse 7). It was God who "appointed Moses," and it was God who "brought their fathers out from the land of Egypt." From the very beginning, it has never been men -- not even great men like Moses -- who were Israel's deliverers, *it was God*. God raises up leaders, and God delivers His people. God uses men, it is true, but men do not save the people of God.

Based upon this central truth -- that God was Israel's deliverer and not men -- Samuel summons the Israelites to take their stand before God (verse 8). The Israelites are on trial, and Samuel is their prosecutor. History is the first witness against Israel. Israel's history is not about Israel's righteousness and the blessings which resulted; Israel's history is about God's righteous deeds, performed on Israel's behalf, and always in the context of Israel's sin. It is God's righteousness which delivered the forefathers of those Israelites who stand before Samuel at Gilgal.

Briefly, Samuel scans Israel's history from the day of the nation's birth at the exodus to the present moment, when Israel now has the king they demanded. Citing illustrations from the major periods (the exodus and Israel's wilderness wanderings, the possession of the land under Joshua, and the period of the judges, ending with Samuel), Samuel seeks to demonstrate a very consistent pattern of behavior on Israel's part, and on God's part in dealing with His people.* Although God graciously gives His people deliverance from their enemies, Israel forgets God and turns to other gods. God gives the nation over to its neighbors, who are the enemies of Israel and who oppress and afflict God's people. The Israelites then acknowledge their sin and cry out to Him for deliverance, which He graciously grants. They acknowledge their idolatry and forsake it, promising to serve God if He will deliver them yet again.²⁷

The Lesson of History and Israel's Demand for a King

(12:12-18a)

12 "When you saw that Nahash the king of the sons of Ammon came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' although the LORD your God *was* your king. 13 "Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you. 14 "If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. 15 "And if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD

will be against you, *as it was* against your fathers. 16 “Even now, take your stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes. 17 “Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD by asking for yourselves a king.” 18 So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day

In verse 12, Samuel links the history he has just recited to the present situation. Like the Israelites of old, God’s people are once again oppressed by a neighbouring nation. This time Nahash leads the Ammonites. The response of the Israelites of Samuel’s day to the threat of the Ammonites is not like the Israelites Samuel has just described in the preceding verses. When oppressed by their enemies, the Israelites of earlier times viewed their circumstances in the light of the Mosaic Covenant, especially Deuteronomy 28-32. They understood that the oppression they suffered at the hands of their enemies was due to their sin. The Israelites of old repented of their sin and cried out to God for deliverance. This is not so with those who now stand before Samuel at Gilgal. These folks do not acknowledge that the reason for their troubles is sin. They attribute their problems to “bad leadership,” specifically Samuel and his sons’ “bad leadership.” Their solution is not to repent of their sin and cry out to God for deliverance; their solution is to get rid of Samuel and obtain a king just like the other nations have.

When Samuel speaks of Nahash and the Ammonites in verse 12, he exposes the real reason the Israelites want a king. They do not acknowledge their sin and trust God to deliver them.³⁸ It is not really that Samuel is so old, too old to judge any longer. It is not really that his sons are corrupt. It is that the Israelites are afraid of an enemy who threatens them and fails to acknowledge the root problem to be their own sin. They pin the blame on bad leadership, and thus feel justified in having the king they really want anyway.³⁹

Years ago, I taught high school courses in a medium security prison, which enabled inmates to obtain a high school diploma. One day, the subject of evolution arose, and I indicated that I believed in creation rather than evolution. I will never forget one inmate’s statement: “I’ll tell you why I believe in evolution,” he boldly announced, “because I won’t believe in God.” I fear the Israelites of Samuel’s day are like this. Notice the “No” at the beginning of the Israelites’ response to Samuel in verse 12. They do not want deliverance God’s way; they want deliverance their way. They do want deliverance, but in a way that excludes God. No wonder God tells Samuel that the people have not rejected him, but they have rejected their God.

In spite of the sin Israel commits against God by asking for a king, God is gracious to His people, giving them **“a way of escape”** in verses 13-15 (see 1 Corinthians 10:13). The first thing Samuel tells the people about this king is that he is *their* king, not *His* king. This king is the one they have chosen, the one for whom *they* ask (verse 13). God sets this one over them as king, but he is *their* king. Verses 14 and 15 should give the Israelites much pause for thought. Do they look upon this king as their deliverer? Have they pinned all their hopes on this man, or on any (mere) man? If so, Samuel’s words must come as a shock.

It seems as though the Israelites of Samuel’s day have the same view of leadership so popular today, which goes something like this:

“As goes the leader, so goes the nation.”

There is an element of truth in this. Corrupt kings do tend to lead the nation into sin. Righteous leaders tend to lead the nation toward righteousness. But here, Samuel is saying something very different. Are the Israelites looking to their king as a “god,” one whom they think will be their savior? Do they think having the right man will assure them of military victory over their enemies, producing peace and financial prosperity? Samuel seems to say that the obedience of the nation to the command of the Lord is the key to national peace and prosperity -- not the prowess of their leader. If the people “will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both they (literally “you”) and their king who reigns over them will follow the LORD their (literally “your”) God” (verse 14).

The king is not the key to Israel’s success. The key is Israel’s trust in and obedience to her God. An unrighteous nation will have an unrighteous king. A righteous nation will have a righteous king. Absolutely nothing has changed by the appointment of a king over Israel. The governing principle is still the Mosaic Covenant, as summed up in Deuteronomy 28-32. Israel will be blessed as she trusts in her God and obeys His commands, and she will likewise be cursed for turning from God and His laws. If the nation trusts God and obeys Him, Israel will have a righteous king and experience God’s promised blessings. If the nation turns from God, her king will most surely not save her from the judgment of God. God’s conditions for divine blessings are the same as they have always been and having a new king will not change this. God has not stepped down from being the King of Israel. His covenant is still the constitution of the land.

At the peak of Israel’s success under her new king, God sets the record straight. The same covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, still governs God’s dealings with His people. Samuel informs the Israelites of the magnitude of their sin in asking for a king as they have done. Even so, his words do not bring forth the proper response, so he underscores the seriousness of their sin in God’s sight by calling

down divine discipline. In a fashion, which appears Elijah-like, Samuel announces divine judgment as an indication of the seriousness of Israel's sin in asking for a king. He makes it clear that judgment will come in relation to the wheat harvest, which is imminent. Though it is not the time for storms or great rain, in response to Samuel's prayer, a great thunderstorm breaks upon the nation. This king-business is serious business to God, and now it is serious to His people.

The storm reminds the people that Samuel is God's prophet, and that rejecting him is not a good idea. It gives great emphasis to Samuel's words, which exposes the demand for a king as a sin. Perhaps most of all, it reminds Israel of a very important truth: both *calamity* and *blessing* come from God:

5 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, 7 The One forming light and creating darkness, *Causing well-being and creating calamity*; I am the LORD who does all these" (Isaiah 45:5-7, emphasis mine).

The Israelites look upon their king as their deliverer. In their minds, this king is the key to success. They believe he will deliver them from their oppressors, and he will bring the nation into prosperity. God reminds Israel that, ultimately, He is both the source of their distress, and He is the source of their blessings. Calamity comes upon the nation because of their sin. Blessing does not come upon the nation for its righteousness, but because of God's mercy and grace. Their prosperity is not due to Israel's doing good, but because in Israel's suffering, she cries out to God for deliverance. Israel's devotion to God and her serving Him is the outgrowth of God's grace, not the source of God's blessings. This truth is clearly communicated in our text.

Wonderful Words of Life

(12:18b-25)

. . . and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. 19 Then all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins *this* evil by asking for ourselves a king." 20 And Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. 21 "And you must not turn aside, for *then you would go* after futile things which cannot profit or deliver, because they are futile. 22 "For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself.

23 “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. 24 “Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. 25 “But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king shall be swept away.”

The Israelites have placed too much stock in their new king, and Samuel’s words and deeds put this into its proper perspective. As a result of Samuel’s preaching – and especially the storm – the people “**greatly feared the LORD and Samuel**” (verse 18b). This is as it should be. While it is not stated, I think we may safely imply that the people’s opinion of the king goes down as their attitude toward Samuel and God improves. Now, the people are beginning to comprehend the greatness of their sin in general, and specifically their sin in demanding a king. They seem to fear further discipline. They plead with Samuel to pray for them. Samuel’s words in response to the petition of the people are truly “wonderful words of life.” Let us focus on several elements in this paragraph.

First, notice that the people do not look to their king for deliverance, but to Samuel. The Israelites now recognize that their foremost problem is not political “leadership,” but sin. They rightly understand that they are deserving of God’s wrath. They know the deliverance they most need is not from their surrounding neighbours, but from the righteous wrath of the God they have rejected. They know they are unworthy of deliverance and sense their need for an intercessor. For this, they beseech Samuel to pray to the Lord on their behalf (verse 19).

Second, observe that Samuel urges the people of Israel to trust in God rather than in men. Samuel’s words are full of mercy, grace, and hope. His message is not one of “sour grapes” for being rejected by the people. He tells the people not to fear. The fear he seeks to set aside is not a healthy fear of God, but an unhealthy fear of having no hope, a fear which would lead to giving up. The Israelites seem to be in danger of concluding that they have failed so badly there is no hope of recovery. Without minimizing the magnitude of their sin, Samuel gives them good reason for faith, hope, and endurance. They must not “turn aside from following the Lord” (verse 20), but they most certainly must turn aside from going after “futile things which can not profit or deliver” (verse 21). Israel’s deliverance from her sins, and her hope for the future, requires that the people cease to worship and serve idols, and seek to worship and serve God alone. Specifically, the “futile thing which cannot profit or deliver Israel” is a king who trusts and serves in place of God. It is not wrong, per se, to have a king. It is wrong to trust in any man for salvation and deliverance from the guilt of your sin. *Only God can truly save and deliver.*

Third, Israel's salvation is not based upon her faithfulness or good works, but upon the grace of God. Nowhere does Samuel urge the Israelites to "try harder" or to do good so that God's blessings may come. Samuel urges the Israelites to *trust in God, whose faithfulness is the basis for their hope and salvation*. Israel's obedience and service to God is spoken of as the *result* of God's grace, not its cause.

24 "Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you" (1 Samuel 12:24).

When Samuel reviews the history of the nation from the exodus up to his own day, he consistently emphasizes the Israelites' sins and God's mercy and grace. Never does Samuel speak of God's salvation as His response to the good works of His people. God comes to the rescue of His sinful people because they "**cried out**" (12:8, 10) for God's deliverance, not because they are worthy of it. God rescues them because of His grace.

This is a very important point which must be clarified and emphasized in light of the Mosaic Covenant. Samuel makes it very clear in this chapter that having a king does not change the basis on which God deals with His people. The Mosaic Covenant speaks of God's conditional blessings and cursings (see Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28-32). In this covenant, less emphasis is placed upon the *promises of blessing for obeying* God's law than on the *promises of cursing for disobedience*. There is good reason for this, as Paul points out in Romans 3:

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. 21 But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:19-26).

The Law of Moses (and thus the Mosaic Covenant) was never given to men as the means of their salvation. The Mosaic Covenant was most certainly God's means of demonstrating the sinfulness of man. The Law condemns every man as

a sinner, worthy of God's eternal wrath. *Doing the deeds of the Law saves no man, for no man has ever kept the Law without fail.* When Samuel points the Israelites to the Mosaic Covenant, he does so to show them that God's judgment (in the form of God's giving the Israelites over to oppression by their neighbors) is due to their failure to abide by His Law. But when he speaks of Israel's hope, Samuel does not urge God's people to try to earn God's blessings by keeping His Law. Rather, he urges them to trust in the God of mercy and grace, who chose them as His people, and who will bring about their salvation for His glory.

Here is the basis for hope, for confidence, and for serving God. God is faithful:

22 For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself (12:22).

Before God had even finished giving the Israelites the Law, they had already turned away from Him and from Moses, as we read in Exodus 32. Like Samuel, Moses interceded for the Israelites. He did not appeal to God on the basis that the people would try harder, that the people would keep His Law. He appealed to God on the basis of His character and His nature. God had chosen this nation, and He had purposed and promised to bring them into the promised land. God's reputation and glory were at stake in Israel's destiny. Thus God can be trusted to complete what He begins -- not because of who we are -- but because of who He is. The Law can only demonstrate men to be sinners, worthy of divine judgment. It is *grace* that saves and sanctifies, It is *grace* that empowers and inspires faith and obedience. And it is *grace*, *God's grace*, that Samuel proclaims to this guilt-ridden people, assuring them that God's salvation is sure because of who He is.

This salvation is by grace -- for those who by His grace **“fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all their heart,”** based upon **“all that God has done for them”** (verse 24). But for those who reject this grace, divine judgment is just as certain as divine salvation:

24 “But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king shall be swept away” (verse 24).

If the people reject God's grace and go their own way, they will be swept away into the captivity which the Mosaic Covenant promises (see Leviticus 26:33-39; Deuteronomy 28:63-68).

If God is gracious and faithful to His covenant with Israel, so is Samuel. The people now ask Samuel to intercede with God on their behalf, even though they have rejected his leadership over them. Like God, Samuel acts graciously and in accordance with his character. He assures the people that he will not sin against

God by forsaking his calling to pray for them and to teach them “**the good and right way**” (verse 23). As in the New Testament, “**prayer and the ministry of the Word**” (see Acts 6:4) are priorities for spiritual leaders. Samuel has no intention of sinning against God by giving up this ministry.”

Conclusion

Our text says a great deal to men in our time, even as it has instructed men through the ages. One of the things it teaches us is to *be careful not to secularize sin*. The Israelites of Samuel’s day fail to discern that their problems (the oppression they experience from the neighbouring nations) is of divine origin, and that it is divine discipline as a result (and corrective) of their sin. The Israelites of Samuel’s day see their subjection to foreign powers as the result of inadequate leadership. God exposes the real problem as sin. I fear we do the same thing. We define a sin problem in secular terms and then seek to find a secular solution.

The church of Jesus Christ has become almost accustomed to defining sin in secular terms and looking for the solution through human means. When the church deals with finances, it turns to the same methods and men who raise large sums of money for secular causes. When the church deals with its organization and structure, it turns to the same secular models employed by massive corporations. When the church sets out to evangelize, it uses the same marketing models as Madison Avenue does to sell soap or shaving cream. And when the church seeks to solve personal and interpersonal problems, it turns to secular psychological terminology and methodology. When we define “sin” in secular terms, and look for its solution by secular means, we are in trouble.”

What a commentary this text is on the character of God and His servant, Samuel. It is no wonder that the rejection of Samuel is the rejection of God. Neither is it any wonder that the faithfulness of God to His people Israel is paralleled by the faithfulness of Samuel in ministering to this people. Samuel’s character is God-like, and its source is from God. What a gracious God we have, who disciplines us when we sin so that we might once again turn to Him in faith, obedience, love, and gratitude.

Our text is a commentary on leadership and the idolatry some practice in regard to their leaders. Leadership is vitally important, whether in the life of a nation, a family, or a church. Godly leaders are the standard (see 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; Ephesians 5:22-33). But leaders always pose a certain danger. *God is our ultimate and final leader; He is over all*. Satan will never be content with his leadership role. He wants more. He wants to be “**like God,**” to hold the position God alone is worthy of holding. Some Christians elevate their leaders above that which is fitting. We can wrongly “idolize” our leaders and put our faith in them

rather than in God. This is what the Israelites did with Saul, and this is why Israel's sin is dealt with in such dramatic terms. It is a danger always before us. *Let us never give to men that which belongs only to God.* Let us not suppose that "a man" will save us, that our future or the future of our church or of our nation depends on one man. This is especially important to remember in presidential elections. Men ought never to be idolized. *God is the ultimate source of our trials and testings and chastening, and God is ultimately the source of our salvation and blessing.* Men are, at best, only God's instruments.

Our text stands as a word of caution to those who seem to be successful. It certainly puts the apparent "success" of Saul into perspective. The people are jubilant after Israel's victory over the Ammonites, but they tend to look upon this "success" as the result of Saul's leadership. In fact, this deliverance, like all others before it, is a reflection of God's grace, and not the evidence of magnificent leadership. Those who seem to be successful must be careful of their definition of success, being sure to regard every human success as the result of divine grace, not human skilfulness and wisdom.

Our text offers a word of hope and encouragement to those devastated by their sin and failures to live up to God's standard. Many are those who think they have failed irreversibly, and that there is no future hope for them, so that they are tempted to give up in their Christian life. **"All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:23). By God's standard, no man is successful, and all men are failures, deserving of God's eternal wrath. *Our hope of salvation is not based upon our performance, but upon God's grace. It is ultimately not our choice of Him, but His choice of us, not our faithfulness, but His.* God is faithful. God is merciful. God is gracious. God is our salvation. Jesus Christ came not to minister to the righteous, but to save sinners. Let all who believe they are failures ponder the wonder of this.

This text is a commentary on salvation. The Israelites of Samuel's day look to Saul (their king) for their salvation, their deliverance. They view salvation in military and monetary terms, not spiritual terms. Our text informs us that no human "king" can save or deliver men from their sin. What Israel's "king" could not do, God's "King" has accomplished – salvation for sinful men who call upon Him for grace. All of Israel's "kings" failed, even the best of them -- David, Solomon, and others. The Israelites are tempted to take a man, appoint him as their king, and trust him as their god. Such a king cannot save. But God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to be the **"King of the Jews,"** for all who would believe in Him. *God (the second person of the Trinity) became man, coming first to live a perfect life, die for the sins of men, and then be raised from the dead and ascend back into heaven. This One, Jesus Christ, is God's King.* He came first to save men from their sins, and He will return soon to establish His kingdom. He

is our hope! He is our salvation! What man's king could never do, God's King has accomplished.

You do not have to become good enough for God to save. You are already bad enough to qualify for His grace. If you have not acknowledged your sin as your ultimate problem, as that which deserves God's eternal wrath, I urge you to do so now. And when you acknowledge your sin, trust in Him who came to bear the penalty of your sin, Jesus Christ. He is truly God and truly man. He is now raised from the dead and is seated at God's right hand in heaven. He is coming soon to bless His saints and to defeat His enemies. *Look to this King and Him alone for salvation from your sin, and for the sure hope of living forever in His kingdom.*

Archaeological light

The Philistines had a monopoly on iron (1 Samuel 13:19-22 which gave them military advantage. They apparently obtained the secret of smelting from the Hittites. Saul and David by their conquests broke this monopoly. Verse 21 should read with the RSV: 'And the charge was a pim (two-thirds of a shekel, approx. One quarter oz.) for the ploughshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening axes and setting the goads.' The iron age extended from 1200 to 300 b.c.

13. Saul's first great failure

Verses 1-10. Saul's self-will.

Verses 11-23. The Lords rejection of aul announced.

1 Samuel 13:1-14

Terror in the Hearts of the Israelites and Their King

(13:1-7)

1 Saul was *forty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned *thirty-two* years over Israel. 2 Now Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel, of which 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. But he sent away the rest of the people, each to his tent. 3 And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of *it*. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." 4 And all Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were then summoned to Saul at Gilgal. 5 Now the

Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven. 6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits. 7 Also *some of* the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

Saul's reign as Israel's king starts out with a bang. Under Saul's leadership, God delivers many Israelites from a humiliating surrender to Nahash, leader of the Ammonite army which threatened the inhabitants of the city of Jabesh-gilead. To accomplish this, a volunteer army of 330,000 Israelites is summoned (11:8). After this victory, the volunteers return home, and Saul retains a small standing army of 3,000 men.

Why does Saul retain such a small standing army? The text does not tell us, but it seems safe to infer that an army of 3,000 men would be tolerated by the Philistines, while a larger standing army would not be. Saul keeps this many men in his army because it is as large of an army as he can maintain without precipitating the wrath and reaction of the Philistines. Saul does not seem willing to "trouble the waters" either by keeping too many soldiers on active duty or taking any action concerning the Philistine garrison(s?) stationed throughout Israel.

Jonathan changes all this, without his father's knowledge or permission. Saul has divided his troops. He keeps 2,000 men with him, stationed in Michmash and the hill country of Judea; the remaining 1,000 are placed under Jonathan's command and stationed at Gibeah. Jonathan's reasoning for attacking the Philistine garrison is not given to us; we are only told that he does so. From what we know of Jonathan elsewhere, it seems that his actions are prompted by faith. After all, God gave this land to the Israelites and instructed them to drive out the nations dwelling in their land. Subjection to a foreign nation is depicted in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-32 as a divine chastening for Israel's unbelief and disobedience. The king is not to facilitate the Israelites' subjection to the surrounding nations but is to be used of God to throw off their shackles (see 14:47-48). This will not happen unless the Israelites act to remove those who occupy their land. Saul seems reluctant and unwilling to "rock the boat." Jonathan seems unwilling to accept things as they are, and thus he leads his men in an attack on the Philistine garrison at Geba,² located approximately 6 miles north of Jerusalem about half-way between Gibeah to the south and Michmash to the north. This may very well be the same garrison stationed in Israel before whom Saul prophesies, along with other prophets (see 10:5, 10-13).

The response of the Philistines to this attack is predictable, causing one to wonder if Jonathan both expected and wanted it. Let me to attempt to describe the Philistines' reaction in modern-day terms. A few years ago, the United States (along with a number of allies) attacked and defeated the Iraqi forces which had occupied Kuwait. Let us suppose that after this victory, the United States placed several companies of our troops inside the Iraqi border to assure that further acts of aggression were thereby checked. Let us then suppose that Saddam Hussein launched a chemical attack on one of those U.S. companies inside Iraq. Reports reach America of the death of hundreds, perhaps thousands, and of many others who are seriously injured. As Americans, we would feel fully justified in taking massive military action against Iraq.

This is very similar to the Philistines' reaction to Jonathan's attack against the garrison in Geba. The Philistines previously defeated the Israelites, and they have given the Israelites considerable freedom (even to wage war against the Ammonites). But they still station troops in Israel to prevent any attempts to throw off the shackles of Philistine bondage. When Jonathan attacks this garrison, it is viewed as an attack against Philistia, and as a monumental insult. As our text puts it, "Israel had become odious (a stench) to the Philistines" (verse 4). The Philistines are coming and are they mad! They will make the Israelites pay for this act -- they fully intend to do great damage to Israel. They come with 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and so many foot soldiers their numbers are as the sand on the seashore. They come up against Israel, camping in Michmash, where Saul has been stationed just recently with his soldiers (verses 2, 5).

It seems as though Saul's response to Jonathan's attack and the Philistines' arrival is a reaction prompted by necessity. In short, Saul seems to have no other choice than to attempt to defend himself against this Philistine attack. Trying to put the best face possible on this situation, Saul blows the trumpet, which summons the whole nation once again to battle. Saul's "press release" might read: "Saul Attacks Philistine Garrison." From an administrative perspective, of course, Jonathan is under Saul's authority, but it appears as though Saul does not want to admit that he is passive while Jonathan takes action.

The situation in chapter 13 appears to be quite different from that described in chapter 11. In chapter 11, Saul is Spirit-empowered when he becomes angry and forcefully calls all Israel to fight the Ammonites. Here, Saul is not said to be empowered by the Spirit, and he is certainly less forceful when calling the nation to war. The Israelites are summoned, but it seems as though far fewer than the earlier 330,000 show up.⁴ Those who do present themselves for battle are tentative in doing so. When the size of the Philistine army is known, the Israelites are terrified. The people begin to desert, hiding in caves and thickets,

in cliffs, cellars,“ and pits. This has happened before (see Judges 6:1-6), but this does not make the situation any more tolerable.

When Saul seeks to gather his army, he summons the people to assemble at Gilgal, according to the instructions Samuel gave him when he was told he would be Israel’s king:

8 “And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do” (1 Samuel 10:8).

Samuel’s instructions are very specific: Saul is to go to Gilgal and wait for him to arrive. It will be seven days before he arrives. Samuel will offer both the burnt offerings and the peace offerings. At that time, Samuel will indicate to Saul what he should do.

During this seven-day waiting period, Saul agonizes as he watches his army shrink when soldiers vaporize in fear of their lives. Every day as the situation grows increasingly more dangerous, soldiers flee, seeking to save themselves. Some seek to save themselves by fleeing across the Jordan (verse 7). Apparently others are willing to save themselves by joining with the Philistines (see 14:21). Those who stay with Saul are shaking in their boots.

Saul’s Folly and Samuel’s Rebuke

(13:8-15)

8 Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him. 9 So Saul said, “Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering. 10 And it came about as soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, that behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him *and* to greet him. 11 But Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, 12 therefore I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favour of the LORD.’ So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering. “ 13 And Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 “But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart,

and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.” 15 Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men.

Saul manages to make it through six days and most of the seventh. But when that seventh day begins to draw to an end, Saul is at his wit’s end. I can just imagine what is going through his mind. “Where in the world is that man, and what is he doing? Does he not know how much danger we are in? Does he not grasp the urgency of the situation and the need to act quickly? I’m going to give him 30 more minutes, and then I’m going to have to go on without him.”

As the people continue to scatter, Saul begins to take matters into his own hands. Every appearance is that Saul offers the burnt offering himself. He issues orders for the burnt offerings and the peace offerings to be brought to him. No mention is made of any priest taking part in the offering. Saul seems to place great importance on this offering, and I think I may know why. In 1 Samuel 7, all Israel gathers at Mizpah to repent and renew their covenant commitment to God. The Philistines misinterpret this gathering, assuming there is some military intent behind it. The Philistines encircle the Israelites at Mizpah and are just about to attack. As the attack is about to commence, Samuel is busy offering the burnt offering:

9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to the LORD; and Samuel cried to the LORD for Israel and the LORD answered him. 10 Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel (1 Samuel 7:9-10).

How easy it would be to look at this offering as the means to Israel’s deliverance. Just as the Israelites looked upon the ark of God as a kind of magic secret weapon, now it may be that Saul looks upon the burnt offering as the means of assuring God’s action on Israel’s behalf. If this is so, no wonder Saul is so eager to get that sacrifice offered, with or without Samuel.

At the very moment Saul finishes sacrificing the burnt offering, Samuel arrives. It seems apparent that had Saul waited those few minutes, Samuel would have arrived, still on time, and still in time to offer both the burnt offerings and the peace offerings. Saul goes out to greet Samuel, and his greeting betrays his guilt. It is not Saul who stands there with his hands on his hips, rebuking Samuel for being too late, but Samuel who asks Saul what he has done. Saul’s explanation falls flat.⁶ He tells Samuel that the people were deserting him and that the prophet did not come within the appointed time. He points out that the

Philistines are assembling for battle at Michmash, making his actions necessary lest he be attacked while at Gilgal. Though he really did not want to do what he did, he simply had to, so he forced himself to offer the burnt offering.

Samuel is not impressed as his direct and stern words show. Saul's actions were foolish -- because they were wilful disobedience to Samuel's clear and direct orders. They were likewise foolish because they accomplished the exact opposite of what Saul thought. Saul must certainly have thought that waiting for Samuel (and the instructions he would give) was foolish. He was wrong. Saul's disobedience will cost him his dynasty. Though his reign will not immediately be terminated, his sons will never sit on his throne. Had Saul but obeyed the command of God, his kingdom would have endured forever. Now, his kingdom will die with him. God has already sought out and chosen a man whose heart is in tune with His to be Saul's replacement. All of this is the direct result of Saul's disobedience.

Samuel's parting here is quite different from that described in 1 Samuel 15:24-31. Here, Saul does not appear to be shaken by Samuel's words, and certainly he is not repentant. If Saul were a teenager in today's culture, his response to Samuel's rebuke would be, "Whatever." Saul busies himself with the numbering of his skimpy rag-tag army, now composed of some 600 men, and Samuel arises and departs for Gibeah.

Conclusion

This incident is not the "beginning of the end" for king Saul; it is the end. His kingdom will endure for a number of years, but it will not endure beyond his death. Two years into his reign, Saul's destiny as king is sealed. As we read these verses, most of us would probably be willing to admit that Saul's actions are almost understandable, and that God's response seems very severe. Why all the fuss about this one incident, this one mess up? Let us first consider the seriousness of Saul's actions and then press on to some of the implications and applications our text offers.

First, we need to understand this passage in the light of what God first declared about kings in the Book of Deuteronomy:

14 "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' 15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, *one* from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. 16 "Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to

Egypt to multiply horses, since the LORD has said to you, 'You shall never again return that way.' 17 "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. 18 "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

Look especially at verses 18-20. When the king ascends to his throne, he is to write a copy of the law for himself -- he is to do this in the presence of the Levitical priests. This seems to imply a very clear "separation of powers." The king has great authority, but when it comes to the law, he is not only subject to it, but he is to listen to the Levitical priests as to its meaning. The Old Testament Book of the Law is the king's textbook, and the Levitical priests are his teachers or tutors. This Law is to be his constant guide, the basis for his rule. He is to read and re-read it all the days of his life. This not only gives the king the wisdom to rule, and the principles on which his kingdom is established (the constitution of the kingdom), but it keeps the king from becoming puffed up with pride and elevating himself above his brethren (verse 20). This constant reading of the Law is to keep the king from disobedience of the Law, even in some small way. Devotion to the Law will prolong the king's days, for both he and his descendants (verse 20).

Does this not explain the severity of God's response to Saul's disobedience? Saul did not heed this instruction to kings set down in Deuteronomy and very likely reiterated and clarified by Samuel:

24 And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people." So all the people shouted and said, "Long live the king!" 25 Then Samuel told the people the ordinances of the kingdom, and wrote them in the book and placed it before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, each one to his house (1 Samuel 10:24-25).

In addition to these more general instructions to Saul as Israel's king, there are the very specific instructions ("**the command**") of 1 Samuel 10:8. Saul has no excuse; his sacrifice is a wilful act of disobedience, for which he loses his kingdom.

Let us now move from Saul and his disobedience to the lessons this text has for each of us today. We shall sum up the important lessons of our text in the form of principles.

(1) Like Saul, when we have no sense of our calling, we are headed for trouble.

The people want a king to judge them, and ultimately this means they want a king to deliver them from their bondage to the nations surrounding them. Samuel makes considerable effort to communicate to Saul what God has appointed him to do, but it does not seem long at all before Saul's sense of calling becomes fuzzy. In our text, Saul seems to lack a deep sense of what he has been called to do, or he lacks the commitment to do it -- or perhaps both. When I look at the writings of the apostle Paul, I see a man with a deep sense of his calling and a great commitment to carry it out -- to the very end (see Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:15; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). Paul speaks a great deal of our calling as well, and he challenges us to live up to that calling -- both our *common calling* (to which every saint is called -- see Romans 1:6-7; 8:28, 30; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:11) and our *individual calling* (1 Corinthians 7:17). Saul does not seem to have a clear sense of what God has called him to do. Much of his floundering seen in these 1 Samuel chapters appears to be the result of his failure to grasp just what he has been called to do.

Each and every Christian has been "called," and each of us has a specific "calling." I am not speaking of a specialized "calling" to "full-time ministry" or to "missionary service." I am speaking of a unique sense of calling, whereby the Christian has a general sense of why God has saved him (or her), and a more specific sense of one's task and contribution in the body of Christ. Too many Christians seem to have lost their sense of calling, and, like Saul, they seem to be "hiding in the luggage" of the church and its ministry, rather than taking up their fair share.

(2) God's commands serve as a test of our faith and obedience.

Saul is given very specific instructions about going to Gilgal and waiting for Samuel. This is the test of Saul's faith and obedience. The Bible's commands are given for good reasons. One reason is that they are very specific tests of our faith. I hear too many Christians today reacting to any emphasis on divine commands and our need to obey. "That's legalism," I hear some say. Some may obey God in a legalistic fashion, and that is a problem. But far too many

Christians take God's commands too lightly. Jesus instructed His disciples to **"teach them to observe all that I commanded you"** (Matthew 28:20). How many of Christ's commands do you take seriously today?

(3) Christian liberties are also a test of our faith and love for God.

In chapter 10, verse 7, Samuel instructs Saul, 7 "And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasions requires; for God is with you."

Just what then keeps Saul from taking on the Philistines who occupy Israel and who oppress the people of God? Why does Saul not do that which obviously needs doing, trusting that in doing so God is with him? Not only do most of us fail to obey God's commands, we also fail to exercise our liberties as we should. Liberties, like the law, are tests we often fail.

(4) Emergencies are not excuses for disobedience to God's commands, but a test of our faith and obedience.

God often tests us by taking us to the limit. That is the way we test the products we manufacture. Ford does not test its cars by gently driving them around the block a few times. They are put on the test track, which hammers the suspension with endless bumps and turns and stresses the engine with high heat, severe cold, and long distances. God tests us by taking us to the limit as well, by taking us to the breaking point.

When we reach "our limit," our faith in God becomes apparent. When we come to the end of our own resources, we must then trust in God. God takes Saul "to the limit" by delaying Samuel's arrival to the last moments, but Saul cannot wait. He is convinced his situation is an "emergency," and as such, the rules can be set aside. At these moments -- when we are pressed to our limit -- our faith and obedience are tested by whether or not we keep God's commands, whether or not we obey Him.

Twice the Book of Proverbs speaks of the **"lion in the road"** (see Proverbs 22:13; 26:13). This is the sluggard's compelling reason for avoiding a task he really does not want to do. After all, who would be outside mowing the grass if there really was a lion out there? *Emergency situations, where disaster seems imminent and breaking the rules seems expedient, may be nothing more than lions in the road. We may be willing to make exceptions to God's commands, but God is not.* Let us beware of allowing a crisis to become the excuse for our disobedience.

I doubt if Saul's disobedience in making the burnt offerings is one isolated event. Rather, it is likely the climax, the culmination, of a long history of disobedience. As previously pointed out, Saul knows that his duty as Israel's

king is to do battle with the Philistines and the other surrounding nations who oppress the people of God. *Day after day, month after month*, Saul seems to close his eyes to the suffering of his people and to the presence of the Philistines stationed in Israel. Saul's disobedience regarding the sacrifices at Gilgal is no sudden sin -- a complete shock to all. *It is the logical, almost inevitable outcome of a lifestyle of disobedience*. This crisis only shows Saul up for who he is (or is not). This is the way it is with us as well.

I cannot help but notice that there is no evidence of spirituality in Saul prior to his becoming king, or afterwards. But David is a young man who learned to depend upon God while a shepherd boy, left alone with his flock. David learned to trust God and to worship him. He has a history of walking with God before he became king, and that continued afterward. Saul has no godly disciplines in his life, and it shows, especially at Gilgal when the tests of faith come upon him.

(5) God's judgment may be pronounced long before its consequences are apparent.

God may pronounce judgment a long time before He carries it out. God has rejected Saul as king. That is, Saul's kingdom will not endure (see 13:14). Having said this, Saul reigns for many years before his death. *We may be certain that God's judgment is sure, even though it may be some time in coming*. That is the way it is with Saul, and that is the way it is with the coming wrath of God. Satan's doom has already been pronounced, and yet we still find him opposing our Lord and His church. Nevertheless, God's judgment is sure, even though it is not immediate.

(6) God works through less than perfect, less than ideal people.

I never cease to wonder at the kind of people God uses to accomplish His purposes and fulfil His promises. Saul is one of those people. In spite of all of his weaknesses and sins, God uses Saul to deliver Israel from bondage to the surrounding nations (see 14:47-48). All through history, God has chosen to use the **"weak and foolish"** things of this world, confounding the wise and bringing glory to Himself. If God can use a man like Saul, we can be assured that He can use us too. How grateful we should be that God is not limited to using perfect people. This does not excuse our imperfections or our sins, but it does give us hope that God can and does use frail, sinful people to accomplish His purposes.

14. Jonathan's heroism

Verses 1-23. Jonathan's great victory

Verses 24-45. Saul's foolish impetuosity

Verses 46-52. Saul's successes and his family

1 Samuel 13:15-14:15

Mission: Impossible

(13:15-23)

15 Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. 16 Now Saul and his son Jonathan and the people who were present with them were staying in Geba of Benjamin while the Philistines camped at Michmash. 17 And the raiders came from the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual, 18 and another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border which overlooks the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness. 19 Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, “Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears.” 20 So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his ploughshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe. 21 And the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes. 22 So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who *were* with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan. 23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

We pick up the story with Samuel leaving Saul in Gilgal and going up to Gibeah, and so it appears, without “showing him what he should do” (10:8). Samuel gives Saul no guidance as to how he should deal with the massive Philistine invasion which results from Jonathan’s attack on the Philistine garrison at Geba (13:3; see also 10:5). In preparation for war, Saul numbers his troops, finding 600 men with him, ready for battle. Given the thousands of Philistine troops, the odds are stacked against Israel and her new king.

We may envision a kind of standoff between the Philistine army, stationed at Michmash, and the Israelite forces under Saul and Jonathan, stationed at Geba (13:16). But this is not quite the case. While the main army of the Philistines seems to be dug in at Michmash, three parties of “**raiders**” (13:17; 14:15) are sent out. One is sent to the north toward Ophrah, another to the west toward Beth-Horon, and the third to the east toward the wilderness (the Israelites are to the south). These raiders, or destroyers, appear to be “special forces” troops, whose task is to kill, burn, or in any other way destroy human life, cattle, buildings or crops. The longer these raiding parties are free to go about bringing

destruction wherever they go, the more serious Israel's situation becomes. If the Philistines are not defeated and driven out of the land, much trouble is ahead for Israel.

Grossly outnumbered, the Israelites are so desperately frightened they are deserting in droves. Saul has foolishly offered the burnt offerings and been rebuked by Samuel. Raiding parties are roaming about the land leaving destruction behind them wherever they go. And now the few remaining Israelite troops are poorly armed when compared to the Philistines. For the Philistines at least, the Iron Age has come. Their technology enables them to have swords and spears of iron and chariots with iron wheels. It enables farmers to have tools which stay sharp longer and are not as inclined to break. The Israelites are not given the Philistines' technology. The Philistines sell iron farming implements to the Israelites, but they do not sell iron weapons to the Israelites nor allow them to make or possess such weapons.⁴⁶ This gives the Philistines a decisive edge (pardon the pun) over the Israelites. The writer informs us of this "edge" and that only Saul and Jonathan possess swords (13:22). Things do not look good for Israel.

Agriculturally speaking, the Israelites are virtually dependent upon the Philistines. They must purchase their farming tools from them and then pay to have them sharpened. Every day of their lives the Israelites are reminded of their subjugation to the Philistines. Militarily speaking, things are hopeless for the Israelites. The Philistines have a massive well-equipped army and raiding parties which roam about Israel at will bringing death and destruction with them. Israel has a small army of very frightened men, many of whom are deserting, with some even defecting to the Philistines (see 14:21). Israel's king is reluctant at best. With such vastly inferior technology, the Israelites are between a rock and a hard place.

We wondered if the Lord was going to come before we arrived. We heard the reports that Israel was out-manned, out-gunned, and thus vulnerable. How wrong were the estimates of Israel's chances of success. How quickly the war was won and ended, all, I believe, due to God's providential care for His people.

Saul's Folly and Jonathan's Faith

(14:1-15)

1 Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on yonder side." But he did not tell his father. 2 And Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who *were* with him *were* about

six hundred men, 3 and Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the LORD at Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. 4 And between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp crag on the one side, and a sharp crag on the other side, and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. 5 The one crag rose on the north opposite Michmash, and the other on the south opposite Geba. 6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few." 7 And his armor bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, *and* here I am with you according to your desire." 8 Then Jonathan said, "Behold, we will cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them. 9 "If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you'; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them. 10 "But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hands; and this shall be the sign to us." 11 And when both of them revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines said, "Behold, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves." 12 So the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor bearer and said, "Come up to us and we will tell you something." And Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hands of Israel." 13 Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some to death after him. 14 And that first slaughter which Jonathan and his armour bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land. 15 And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling.

A teacher in my seminary class, made a comparison of Jacob and Isaac and described Jacob by saying: "If Isaac was a slow leak; Jacob was a blowout!" I must admit that the more I read of Saul, the less I like him. Let's review what we have been told about Saul. In chapter 8, the people demand a king. In chapters 9 and 10, Saul is divinely designated as Israel's king. Further, Saul is divinely enabled to serve as Israel's king by the Spirit of God who comes upon him. I am especially interested in the Spirit's coming upon Saul and the implications of that event as indicated by God through Samuel:

5 "Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that

you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying. 6 “Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. 7 “And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you. 8 “And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do.” 9 Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. 10 When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them (1 Samuel 10:5-10).

The previous two signs are for Saul alone to convince him that Samuel’s words are from God. The Spirit’s coming upon Saul with power is a sign both to Saul and to the people who witness this event (10:11-12). Samuel’s words to Saul, as recorded in verse 7, are very significant. When these signs are fulfilled, Samuel instructs Saul that he is to **“do for himself what the occasion requires,”** assured that the Lord is with him in what he does. In verse 8, Samuel then gives specific instructions regarding Saul’s going to Gilgal and waiting there seven days, when he will offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and **“show Saul what you should do.”** Why do two years or more separate the Spirit’s coming upon Saul and Saul’s journey to Gilgal? Why do we hear of no action on Saul’s part in those intervening years between his enablement and his going to Gilgal?

We should acknowledge that Saul does summon the Israelites to battle with the Ammonites to protect their brethren in Jabesh-gilead (chapter 11). As I read the text, this is not so much a decision consciously reached by Saul as an immediate manifestation of the Spirit’s coming upon him in an unusual way -- Saul does not act as much as the Spirit acts. Ultimately, it is hardly Saul who initiates the war with the Ammonites; it is the Spirit of God.

In times past, God raised up judges to deliver the Israelites from their enemies:

10 “And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve Thee.' 11 “Then the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security” (1 Samuel 12:10-11).

It is quite clear that the Israelites want (demand) a king to lead them in battle (see 8:19-20). There is a very interesting addition to the text of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) in chapter 10, verse 1. The New King James Bible tells us what is added in its marginal note at verse 1:

LXX, Vg. add And you shall deliver His people from the hands of their enemies all around them. And this shall be a sign to you that God has anointed you to be a prince.

Later on, in chapter 14, Saul's administration as Israel's king is summed up in this way:

47 Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment. 48 And he acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them (1 Samuel 14:47-48).

If I understand the text correctly, Israel demands a king who will deliver them from their surrounding enemies as the judges have done before. God gives them Saul as their king, who is to deliver them from their enemies, as both Saul and the nation trust in Him and obey His commandments. The Spirit of God comes upon Saul, as He did upon Samson and others, to enable him to lead the Israelites victoriously against their enemies. Once the Spirit comes upon him, Samuel instructs, he is to take the appropriate action, trusting that God is with him in delivering Israel from the enemies about them.

It seems that Saul is not a spiritual man. Although Samuel is known to Saul's uncle (10:14-16) and to his servant (10:5-10), he is apparently unknown to Saul, and this in a day when prophecy is extremely rare (3:1). The circuit Samuel travels (8:16-17), at its most distant point, is not much more than 15 miles from Saul's home town, Gibeah. And Samuel's home town of Ramah is approximately 3 miles from Gibeah, Saul's home town. How can any spiritually sensitive man not know about Samuel?

The situation only worsens. We know that with the threat to Jabesh-gilead, Saul feels "forced" to act and that the army he summons consists of 330,000 Israelites. Once the Ammonites are defeated, why does Saul not continue on, driving out the Philistines as well? This, after all, is what he has been appointed to do. Instead, Saul sends these soldiers to their homes, keeping only a skeleton standing army, a small force of 3,000 men, and these troops are divided into two companies. It is just as though Saul does not want to take on the Philistines and that he is willing to live with the status quo. It is not Saul's initiative, but that of

his son, Jonathan, which brings about the confrontation with the Philistines, eventually leading to their defeat.

It is no wonder Samuel goes to such effort to remind the Israelites that it has always been their God who delivers them from their enemies. It is also no wonder that Samuel calls the nation to repentance for placing too much faith in their king rather than in their God. Chapter 13 focuses on the nation Israel and the threat of the Philistines, who have not only occupied Israel but are threatening to destroy it. Chapter 14 focuses on Saul and his son Jonathan in a way that takes up the author's contrast of these two men, which began in chapter 13.

The Philistines finally manage to gain the upper hand in the hill country of Judah and Benjamin, establishing their primary base at Michmash (13:16), apparently at the summit of the mountains separating the plains of the Jordan Valley and the coastal plains where the Philistines live. About 600 soldiers remain with Saul and Jonathan while the rest desert, either hiding themselves from the Philistines or joining with them (13:6-7; 14:20-22). Saul and his "army" are stationed at Geba (13:16), and by chapter 14 at Gibeah, a little further south and a little further away from the Philistines who are still at Michmash to the north.

What a contrast our author brings out between Saul and his son, Jonathan. The nation Israel is at war, desperately outnumbered and miserably equipped. And yet Saul is found under "*the* pomegranate tree which is in Migron" (14:2). While Saul stays out of the sun and safely out of reach of the Philistines, his son Jonathan is about to take on some more Philistines, accompanied by his armour-bearer. This foray is a private one. Jonathan does not ask permission from his father nor inform him, and he does not let anyone else know of his departure either. I think he knows what his father will think of any aggressive action against the Philistines. Saul doesn't want to cause trouble with the Philistines, and Jonathan no longer wants Israel to be troubled by the Philistines.

There sits Saul under the one shade tree in the area (so it seems). Saul has one of the only two swords in Israel. Along with Saul is Ahitub, brother of Ichabod, son of Phinehas, and grandson of Eli (14:3). Ahitub wears (or carries with him) the ephod, one of the means for discerning the will of God (see 1 Samuel 23:9-12; 30:6-8). Saul does not get instructions from Samuel at Gilgal because of his disobedience (13:1-14), and now he has the ephod and a priest with him, yet he never inquires of God as to what he should do.

Jonathan, however, has a definite sense of the will of God, which prompts him to take action. First, Jonathan knows much about the will of God from Israel's history and from the nature of God Himself. Jonathan's words to his armor-

bearer are filled with a sense of faith and duty. They are words which explain his confidence and action and which undergird the loyalty of his armor-bearer:

6 “Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few” (14:6).

The Philistines are **“uncircumcised;”** they do not have a covenant relationship with God as do the Israelites. The covenant God made with Israel assures them of God’s presence and protection from their enemies. God brings them out of Egyptian slavery and promises to give them the land of Canaan and freedom from the surrounding nations. Israel surely does not have this. Philistine garrisons occupy the land, and Israelites cannot even farm without buying tools and maintenance from the Philistines. Jonathan understands that God does not intend for His people to be enslaved by the surrounding nations. He understands that it is now the king’s responsibility to lead the people into battle against the enemies of Israel and their God. He also understands from God’s nature and from Israel’s history that Israel’s victory is not dependent upon the **“arm of the flesh,”** the number of troops or the kind of weapons they possess. God gave Israel victory over the Midianites under Gideon as he led his 300 men into battle (see Judges 7). If it is God’s will for Israel to prevail over her enemies, it doesn’t take 600 men -- it may take only two.

The question in Jonathan’s mind is not whether God can deliver the Philistines into the hands of the Israelites, but whether this is God’s will. Saul has the priest and the ephod, but he does not care to inquire of God. He prefers to sit under that shade tree! And so Jonathan determines another way to discern the will of God with regard to his intended foray against the Philistine garrison.

Jonathan seeks a sign from God which will indicate whether he and his armor-bearer should attack the Philistines. Michmash and Gibeah are two high points in the area. Access to Michmash is through the Michmash pass, a very narrow pass, apparently the course of a small stream. The Philistines seem to have a small company of soldiers stationed at the top of this pass where they can spot anyone who tries to pass through to Michmash and stop them. Jonathan’s plan is to scale down the rocky face of one crag and make his presence known to the Philistines stationed atop the crag on the other side of the narrow pass. If the soldiers indicate they are coming down to attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer, they will not attempt to go up the crag to the Philistines on the other side. If, however, the Philistines challenge them to come up, this will be the sign that God wants them to make the dangerous climb up to the Philistine outpost and that He will give Israel^a victory over them.

With his armour-bearer's full support, these two valiant Israelites make themselves visible, apparently by scaling down the face of the one crag to the pass below. The Philistine lookouts spot them and suppose they have come out of hiding in the rocks. The Philistines then invite these two men up, and Jonathan and his armour-bearer receive this as God's sign that He will give them a victory.

I could never imagine how the Philistines could say such a thing. Why do they not send boulders and rocks down upon Jonathan and his helper? Why do they not dispatch troops down to them in the pass below to kill them? Why, when these two men are the most vulnerable as they scale up the rocky crag, do the Philistines not take advantage of their vulnerability and kill them quickly and easily? I think the answer is in the text. The Philistines invite the two Israelites up to "tell them something." At first, I thought this was a challenge, and I guess it could be. Maybe things are dull and boring, and the Philistines want a little contest, so they intend to let the two come to the top where they can engage them.

I am now inclined to a different explanation. I believe the Philistines let Jonathan and his armour bearer come up to them to surrender to them and join with them against Israel. The Philistines have to know they have the upper hand. They know they have superior weapons and vastly outnumber the 600 soldiers who follow Saul. They know they can send raiders about the country with very little resistance from the Israelites. And they have already added a number of Israelites to their own troops (14:21). Why not allow these two frightened Israelites, who are crawling out of their holes, to give themselves up and join with the winning army? For the Philistines to take this position is certainly not a sure thing, but it does make for a convincing sign, at least in Jonathan's mind. And so they climb up that steep, rocky crag to the awaiting Philistines.

The Philistines did not bargain for what occurred. Jonathan begins to wield his sword, and those left alive behind him, his armor bearer dispatches. Within a short distance and a short time, this lookout squad is dead, making it possible for the Israelites to come through the pass to Michmash and pursue the Philistines.

But wait -- as the \$19.95 television commercials say -- there's more! If God is with Jonathan in his attack on this Philistine outpost, He is now about to reveal His mighty arm by giving Israel a victory over the Philistine garrison at Michmash. I love the play on words found in chapters 13 and 14:

7 Also *some of* the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he *was* still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling (1 Samuel 13:7).

15 And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling (1 Samuel 14:15).

Was it not Elvis Presley who sang, “I’m all shook up, uh uh uh. . .”? Well, God “shook up” the Philistines. It all starts with the Israelite troops who follow Saul. They see how desperately weak their position is against the Philistines. They also must sense the weakness of Saul’s leadership. They are in serious trouble -- as our author informs us, they are “all shook up” (13:7). Does this keep God from giving Israel the victory? Certainly not! God proceeds to “shake up” the Philistines.

Imagine, if you can, the smug sense of security the Philistines must feel as they are safely hidden away at Michmash. In order for the puny Israelite army to get to them, they have to pass through the Michmash pass, and a mere 20 men can easily hold off such a force. The Philistines find their security in a narrow pass, at the high point of the mountains, protected by massive rock, which is all well and good until an earthquake occurs. Now this former place of safety becomes the most dangerous place in the world. Saul and his watchmen look on as the Philistine army surges in one direction and then another, probably in synchronous motion with the ground which is rolling about like sea billows in a storm. All of the things which once seemed to assure them of having the edge over the Israelites turn into liabilities. In the panic and motion, their swords kill one another, not the Israelites. Their horses and chariots are useless as in their terror the animals refuse to obey, gaping cracks appear in the ground, and rock falls from the sides of the pass above. Absolute panic prevails everywhere preventing any attack and hindering any retreat. The Philistines become their own worst enemies, killing one another in the insanity of these moments.

Conclusion

What an incredible passage from which to draw several principles and their implications for us as Christians today.

The *first* area of instruction and application which leaps from this passage is the subject of leadership. In Christian circles today, the subject of leadership is a major area of thought, writing, and discussion. Sadly, much of the teaching on leadership in those Christian circles is simply sanctified, warmed-over secular *theory* on leadership. Since there is no end to such material, we need not restate the secular wisdom on leadership. Saul and Jonathan provide us with both negative and positive examples of spiritual leadership. The words *trust* and *obey* may not sum up all there is to say about the Christian life, but they certainly describe two vitally important dimensions. Saul is a man of little faith. The word “fear” seems to better characterize this man. He is afraid to tell his uncle that

Samuel has anointed him as king of Israel. He hides in the luggage when he knows he will be publicly selected as the king. He is afraid he will lose all of his troops, and so he forces himself to offer the burnt offerings. And it seems that he is so afraid to take on the Philistines that he does as little as possible to attack or provoke them.

The “Saul” we see in chapter 11 is the “new Saul” which God brings to pass as the Spirit comes mightily upon him. But this Saul does not seem to last beyond chapter 11. It is the “old Saul” we find elsewhere. It is the “old Saul” we see described in chapters 13 and 14. When the “new Saul” summons the Israelites to war, 330,000 report for duty. When the “old Saul” summons Israel to Gilgal, only a small fraction of this number report, and many of those who do report desert out of fear. Saul’s fear is contagious. Since he does not trust and obey God, his followers do not trust or obey him.

How different Jonathan is -- here is a man of faith. He trusts God to give him the victory over the Philistine garrison in chapter 13. He is willing to take on the Philistines in the Michmash pass, even when it involves scaling a rocky crag with his armour, accompanied only by his one servant. This is a man who trusts God regardless of what the odds appear to be. And here is a man whom his armour bearer is willing to follow into battle, even when it looks like suicide. Why? I believe it is because Jonathan is not only a man of personal faith, but a man whose faith is contagious. Those around Saul tremble because he trembles. Those close to Jonathan trust God because he trusts God.

This leads to a very simple definition of spiritual leadership:

Spiritual leadership begins with a man’s faith in God, which compels him to obediently take action in the face of obstacles and opposition, and motivates others to follow him in his obedience.

Ultimately spiritual leadership is not about looks, charm, or motivational and management techniques. Spiritual leadership is about men and women who trust God and obey His word, and in so doing, attract others to trust and obey with them. Saul is not a spiritual leader; Jonathan is.

A *second* application pertains to our appraisal of the success of leaders. Let me try to state this as a principle:

When leaders succeed, it is ultimately due to the grace of God, and often may be the result of the faithfulness of others whose supportive ministry is not nearly so evident.

Consider these verses which speak of the success of Saul’s leadership:

47 Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment. 48 And he acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them (1 Samuel 14:47-48).

I do not want to take away all credit from Saul, but I do believe our text makes it very clear that Saul is successful because of the grace of God, not because of his skill, courage, or greatness. And the victory Israel wins over the Philistines is not due to Saul's initiative, but the initiative of his son. How many times are those heralded as great leaders the recipients of praise which belongs to those who, behind the scenes, make them great? Many are those who seek the spotlight. *Blessed are those who make those in authority over them look good, while standing clear of the spotlight.*

A *third* area of application is the relationship between faith and action. By contrast, Jonathan and Saul illustrate the way faith should behave. Faith is sometimes evident by our waiting, rather than by our working. Faith waits when our work would be disobedience. Abraham should have waited for his promised son, rather than working to obtain one through Hagar. Saul should have waited, rather than work at offering the burnt offerings. When there is no way for us to work in faith and obedience, we should wait for God to work in a way that provides for our needs.

At other times, we are inclined to wait when faith should be evidenced by our works. Saul, who could not wait for Samuel (even though commanded to do so), is more than willing to wait to rid Israel of their bondage to the Philistines, who not only occupy their land (their garrisons) but economically oppress the Israelites by their monopoly on iron working. A farmer could not go even make a living without paying too much for his iron implements, and then paying over and over for maintaining them (sharpening). Saul seems very intent on maintaining the status quo with the Philistines. He can (and apparently does) wait indefinitely to drive out the Philistines. Here is needed action which requires faith, but Saul wants to wait. His attacks on the Philistine garrisons provoke the military confrontation which results in the defeat of the Philistines - and in the glory of God. *How often we wait when we should be working and work when we should be waiting.* How do we know when to work? *When God's Word instructs us to do so.* When do we wait? *When God's Word instructs us to do so, and when working evidences our lack of faith and disobedience.*

Fourth, along with many others in the Bible, our text gives us a whole new perspective on situations which appear to be impossible. Here, as elsewhere,

God brings His people into circumstances which seem impossible. Again, we find a very important principle illustrated in our text:

God purposely brings men into “impossible” situations to make it perfectly clear that we cannot save ourselves, and He delivers us in a way that brings Him all the glory for doing so.

Elsewhere in the Bible we read:

8 “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images” (Isaiah 42:8).

So many times in the Bible God places men in impossible situations so that He can save them in such a way that He receives the glory for having done so. He promised a child to Abram and Sarai, who, humanly speaking, were “**dead**” with respect to their ability to have children (see Romans 4:19), and they had a child. Jesus knew that Lazarus was sick, but He deliberately waited until he was dead to go to his grave (see John 11), so that He might show His power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead.

God loves to show His strength through our weaknesses. Chapter 13 of 1 Samuel shows Israel and Saul in all their weakness. The Israelite soldiers are vastly outnumbered by the Philistines and desperately outclassed in terms of their weapons. In spite of what appears to be a hopeless situation, God brings about a significant victory over the Philistines. And this happens because two men (one without a sword) trust God enough to take on the Philistines. God turns the trembling of the Israelites into the trembling of an earthquake, so powerful that it brings confusion and chaos into the ranks of the Philistines, and most of those who die at the edge of the sword die at the hand of their Philistine brethren.

Many Christians seem to have faith when victory appears possible through merely human effort, but they collapse when circumstances appear impossible. We should learn from Jonathan that God’s victory is not contingent upon our strength, and from the apostle Paul that His strength is manifested through our weaknesses (see 1 Samuel 14:6; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

The emphasis in secular circles (and unfortunately evangelical circles as well) is upon the “power of positive thinking.” Perhaps there is an element of truth in all of this, but there is also a significant error. God is not limited by our abilities as the deliverance of Saul, Jonathan, and Israel from the Philistines demonstrates. And God is not limited by our imagination or our thoughts either.

9 But just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED

THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

God brings sinners to the point of despair and hopelessness (in their circumstances, in their “self- righteousness” and in their sin) so that they will cease trusting in themselves and turn to Him for salvation. What no man has ever been able to do to save himself, Jesus Christ has done on the cross of Calvary. He lived a perfect life of obedience to God. He died, not for His own sins, but for the sins of men. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and He offers to sinful and unworthy men the gift of His righteousness and eternal life. Jesus paid it all. All we need do is to admit our sin, our unworthiness, and our utter inability to save ourselves. What is impossible for men is possible for God:

27 But He said, “The things impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

Have you come to the end of yourself? Have you seen that earning God’s favor and getting to heaven are humanly impossible? If so, this is a blessing, if you then trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation.

Let us conclude our study by praising God with the apostle Paul for His wisdom in accomplishing things we thought impossible, through means we could never imagine:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36).¹

1 Samuel 13:15-14:15

Mission: Impossible

(13:15-23)

15 Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six

hundred men. 16 Now Saul and his son Jonathan and the people who were present with them were staying in Geba of Benjamin while the Philistines camped at Michmash. 17 And the raiders came from the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual, 18 and another company turned toward Beth-horon, and another company turned toward the border which overlooks the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness. 19 Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, “Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears.” 20 So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe. 21 And the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the hoes. 22 So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who *were* with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan. 23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

We pick up the story with Samuel leaving Saul in Gilgal and going up to Gibeah, and so it appears, without “showing him what he should do” (10:8). Samuel gives Saul no guidance as to how he should deal with the massive Philistine invasion which results from Jonathan’s attack on the Philistine garrison at Geba (13:3; see also 10:5). In preparation for war, Saul numbers his troops, finding 600 men with him, ready for battle. Given the thousands of Philistine troops, the odds are stacked against Israel and her new king.

We may envision a kind of standoff between the Philistine army, stationed at Michmash, and the Israelite forces under Saul and Jonathan, stationed at Geba (13:16). But this is not quite the case. While the main army of the Philistines seems to be dug in at Michmash, three parties of “**raiders**” (13:17; 14:15) are sent out. One is sent to the north toward Ophrah, another to the west toward Beth-Horon, and the third to the east toward the wilderness (the Israelites are to the south). These raiders, or destroyers, appear to be “special forces” troops, whose task is to kill, burn, or in any other way destroy human life, cattle, buildings or crops. The longer these raiding parties are free to go about bringing destruction wherever they go, the more serious Israel’s situation becomes. If the Philistines are not defeated and driven out of the land, much trouble is ahead for Israel.

Grossly outnumbered, the Israelites are so desperately frightened they are deserting in droves. Saul has foolishly offered the burnt offerings and been rebuked by Samuel. Raiding parties are roaming about the land leaving destruction behind them wherever they go. And now the few remaining Israelite troops are poorly armed when compared to the Philistines. For the Philistines at

least, the Iron Age has come. Their technology enables them to have swords and spears of iron and chariots with iron wheels. It enables farmers to have tools which stay sharp longer and are not as inclined to break. The Israelites are not given the Philistines' technology. The Philistines sell iron farming implements to the Israelites, but they do not sell iron weapons to the Israelites nor allow them to make or possess such weapons.⁴⁶ This gives the Philistines a decisive edge (pardon the pun) over the Israelites. The writer informs us of this "edge" and that only Saul and Jonathan possess swords (13:22). Things do not look good for Israel.

Agriculturally speaking, the Israelites are virtually dependent upon the Philistines. They must purchase their farming tools from them and then pay to have them sharpened. Every day of their lives the Israelites are reminded of their subjugation to the Philistines. Militarily speaking, things are hopeless for the Israelites. The Philistines have a massive well-equipped army and raiding parties which roam about Israel at will bringing death and destruction with them. Israel has a small army of very frightened men, many of whom are deserting, with some even defecting to the Philistines (see 14:21). Israel's king is reluctant at best. With such vastly inferior technology, the Israelites are between a rock and a hard place.

Saul's Folly and Jonathan's Faith

(14:1-15)

1 Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on yonder side." But he did not tell his father. 2 And Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who *were* with him *were* about six hundred men, 3 and Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the LORD at Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. 4 And between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp crag on the one side, and a sharp crag on the other side, and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. 5 The one crag rose on the north opposite Michmash, and the other on the south opposite Geba. 6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few." 7 And his armor bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, *and* here I am with you according to your desire." 8 Then Jonathan said,

“Behold, we will cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them. 9 “If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you'; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them. 10 “But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hands; and this shall be the sign to us.” 11 And when both of them revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines said, “Behold, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.” 12 So the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor bearer and said, “Come up to us and we will tell you something.” And Jonathan said to his armor bearer, “Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hands of Israel.” 13 Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some to death after him. 14 And that first slaughter which Jonathan and his armour bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land. 15 And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling.

When I was in Dr. Bruce Waltke’s seminary class, he made a comparison of Jacob and Isaac and described Jacob by saying: “If Isaac was a slow leak; Jacob was a blowout!” I must admit that the more I read of Saul, the less I like him. Let’s review what we have been told about Saul. In chapter 8, the people demand a king. In chapters 9 and 10, Saul is divinely designated as Israel’s king. Further, Saul is divinely enabled to serve as Israel’s king by the Spirit of God who comes upon him. I am especially interested in the Spirit’s coming upon Saul and the implications of that event as indicated by God through Samuel:

5 “Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying. 6 “Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. 7 “And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you. 8 “And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do.” 9 Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. 10 When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God

came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them (1 Samuel 10:5-10).

The previous two signs are for Saul alone to convince him that Samuel's words are from God. The Spirit's coming upon Saul with power is a sign both to Saul and to the people who witness this event (10:11-12). Samuel's words to Saul, as recorded in verse 7, are very significant. When these signs are fulfilled, Samuel instructs Saul that he is to **“do for himself what the occasion requires,”** assured that the Lord is with him in what he does. In verse 8, Samuel then gives specific instructions regarding Saul's going to Gilgal and waiting there seven days, when he will offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and **“show Saul what you should do.”** Why do two years or more separate the Spirit's coming upon Saul and Saul's journey to Gilgal? Why do we hear of no action on Saul's part in those intervening years between his enablement and his going to Gilgal?

We should acknowledge that Saul does summon the Israelites to battle with the Ammonites to protect their brethren in Jabesh-gilead (chapter 11). As I read the text, this is not so much a decision consciously reached by Saul as an immediate manifestation of the Spirit's coming upon him in an unusual way -- Saul does not act as much as the Spirit acts. Ultimately, it is hardly Saul who initiates the war with the Ammonites; it is the Spirit of God.

In times past, God raised up judges to deliver the Israelites from their enemies:

10 “And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve Thee.' 11 “Then the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security” (1 Samuel 12:10-11).

It is quite clear that the Israelites want (demand) a king to lead them in battle (see 8:19-20). There is a very interesting addition to the text of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) in chapter 10, verse 1. The New King James Bible tells us what is added in its marginal note at verse 1:

LXX, Vg. add And you shall deliver His people from the hands of their enemies all around them. And this shall be a sign to you that God has anointed you to be a prince.

Later on, in chapter 14, Saul's administration as Israel's king is summed up in this way:

47 Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom,

the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment. 48 And he acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them (1 Samuel 14:47-48).

If I understand the text correctly, Israel demands a king who will deliver them from their surrounding enemies as the judges have done before. God gives them Saul as their king, who is to deliver them from their enemies, as both Saul and the nation trust in Him and obey His commandments. The Spirit of God comes upon Saul, as He did upon Samson and others, to enable him to lead the Israelites victoriously against their enemies. Once the Spirit comes upon him, Samuel instructs, he is to take the appropriate action, trusting that God is with him in delivering Israel from the enemies about them.

It seems that Saul is not a spiritual man. Although Samuel is known to Saul's uncle (10:14-16) and to his servant (10:5-10), he is apparently unknown to Saul, and this in a day when prophecy is extremely rare (3:1). The circuit Samuel travels (8:16-17), at its most distant point, is not much more than 15 miles from Saul's home town, Gibeah. And Samuel's home town of Ramah is approximately 3 miles from Gibeah, Saul's home town. How can any spiritually sensitive man not know about Samuel?

The situation only worsens. We know that with the threat to Jabesh-gilead, Saul feels "forced" to act and that the army he summons consists of 330,000 Israelites. Once the Ammonites are defeated, why does Saul not continue on, driving out the Philistines as well? This, after all, is what he has been appointed to do. Instead, Saul sends these soldiers to their homes, keeping only a skeleton standing army, a small force of 3,000 men, and these troops are divided into two companies. It is just as though Saul does not want to take on the Philistines and that he is willing to live with the status quo. It is not Saul's initiative, but that of his son, Jonathan, which brings about the confrontation with the Philistines, eventually leading to their defeat.

It is no wonder Samuel goes to such effort to remind the Israelites that it has always been their God who delivers them from their enemies. It is also no wonder that Samuel calls the nation to repentance for placing too much faith in their king rather than in their God. Chapter 13 focuses on the nation Israel and the threat of the Philistines, who have not only occupied Israel but are threatening to destroy it. Chapter 14 focuses on Saul and his son Jonathan in a way that takes up the author's contrast of these two men, which began in chapter 13.

The Philistines finally manage to gain the upper hand in the hill country of Judah and Benjamin, establishing their primary base at Michmash (13:16),

apparently at the summit of the mountains separating the plains of the Jordan Valley and the coastal plains where the Philistines live. About 600 soldiers remain with Saul and Jonathan while the rest desert, either hiding themselves from the Philistines or joining with them (13:6-7; 14:20-22). Saul and his “army” are stationed at Geba (13:16), and by chapter 14 at Gibeah, a little further south and a little further away from the Philistines who are still at Michmash to the north.

What a contrast our author brings out between Saul and his son, Jonathan. The nation Israel is at war, desperately outnumbered and miserably equipped. And yet Saul is found under “the pomegranate tree which is in Migron” (14:2). While Saul stays out of the sun and safely out of reach of the Philistines, his son Jonathan is about to take on some more Philistines, accompanied by his armor-bearer. This foray is a private one. Jonathan does not ask permission from his father nor inform him, and he does not let anyone else know of his departure either. I think he knows what his father will think of any aggressive action against the Philistines. Saul doesn’t want to cause trouble with the Philistines, and Jonathan no longer wants Israel to be troubled by the Philistines.

There sits Saul under the one shade tree in the area (so it seems). Saul has one of the only two swords in Israel. Along with Saul is Ahitub, brother of Ichabod, son of Phinehas, and grandson of Eli (14:3). Ahitub wears (or carries with him) the ephod, one of the means for discerning the will of God (see 1 Samuel 23:9-12; 30:6-8). Saul does not get instructions from Samuel at Gilgal because of his disobedience (13:1-14), and now he has the ephod and a priest with him, yet he never inquires of God as to what he should do.

Jonathan, however, has a definite sense of the will of God, which prompts him to take action. First, Jonathan knows much about the will of God from Israel’s history and from the nature of God Himself. Jonathan’s words to his armor-bearer are filled with a sense of faith and duty. They are words which explain his confidence and action and which undergird the loyalty of his armor-bearer:

6 “Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few” (14:6).

The Philistines are “**uncircumcised;**” they do not have a covenant relationship with God as do the Israelites. The covenant God made with Israel assures them of God’s presence and protection from their enemies. God brings them out of Egyptian slavery and promises to give them the land of Canaan and freedom from the surrounding nations. Israel surely does not have this. Philistine garrisons occupy the land, and Israelites cannot even farm without buying tools and maintenance from the Philistines. Jonathan understands that God does not

intend for His people to be enslaved by the surrounding nations. He understands that it is now the king's responsibility to lead the people into battle against the enemies of Israel and their God. He also understands from God's nature and from Israel's history that Israel's victory is not dependent upon the **“arm of the flesh,”** the number of troops or the kind of weapons they possess. God gave Israel victory over the Midianites under Gideon as he led his 300 men into battle (see Judges 7). If it is God's will for Israel to prevail over her enemies, it doesn't take 600 men -- it may take only two.

The question in Jonathan's mind is not whether God can deliver the Philistines into the hands of the Israelites, but whether this is God's will. Saul has the priest and the ephod, but he does not care to inquire of God. He prefers to sit under that shade tree! And so Jonathan determines another way to discern the will of God with regard to his intended foray against the Philistine garrison.

Jonathan seeks a sign from God which will indicate whether he and his armor-bearer should attack the Philistines. Michmash and Gibeah are two high points in the area. Access to Michmash is through the Michmash pass, a very narrow pass, apparently the course of a small stream. The Philistines seem to have a small company of soldiers stationed at the top of this pass where they can spot anyone who tries to pass through to Michmash and stop them. Jonathan's plan is to scale down the rocky face of one crag and make his presence known to the Philistines stationed atop the crag on the other side of the narrow pass. If the soldiers indicate they are coming down to attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer, they will not attempt to go up the crag to the Philistines on the other side. If, however, the Philistines challenge them to come up, this will be the sign that God wants them to make the dangerous climb up to the Philistine outpost and that He will give Israel's victory over them.

With his armour-bearer's full support, these two valiant Israelites make themselves visible, apparently by scaling down the face of the one crag to the pass below. The Philistine lookouts spot them and suppose they have come out of hiding in the rocks. The Philistines then invite these two men up, and Jonathan and his armor-bearer receive this as God's sign that He will give them a victory.

I could never imagine how the Philistines could say such a thing. Why do they not send boulders and rocks down upon Jonathan and his helper? Why do they not dispatch troops down to them in the pass below to kill them? Why, when these two men are the most vulnerable as they scale up the rocky crag, do the Philistines not take advantage of their vulnerability and kill them quickly and easily? I think the answer is in the text. The Philistines invite the two Israelites up to “tell them something.” At first, I thought this was a challenge, and I guess

it could be. Maybe things are dull and boring, and the Philistines want a little contest, so they intend to let the two come to the top where they can engage them.

I am now inclined to a different explanation. I believe the Philistines let Jonathan and his armor bearer come up to them to surrender to them and join with them against Israel. The Philistines have to know they have the upper hand. They know they have superior weapons and vastly outnumber the 600 soldiers who follow Saul. They know they can send raiders about the country with very little resistance from the Israelites. And they have already added a number of Israelites to their own troops (14:21). Why not allow these two frightened Israelites, who are crawling out of their holes, to give themselves up and join with the winning army? For the Philistines to take this position is certainly not a sure thing, but it does make for a convincing sign, at least in Jonathan's mind. And so they climb up that steep, rocky crag to the awaiting Philistines.

The Philistines did not bargain for what occurred. Jonathan begins to wield his sword, and those left alive behind him, his armor bearer dispatches. Within a short distance and a short time, this lookout squad is dead, making it possible for the Israelites to come through the pass to Michmash and pursue the Philistines.

If God is with Jonathan in his attack on this Philistine outpost, He is now about to reveal His mighty arm by giving Israel a victory over the Philistine garrison at Michmash. I love the play on words found in chapters 13 and 14:

7 Also *some* of the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he *was* still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling (1 Samuel 13:7).

15 And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling (1 Samuel 14:15).

God "shook up" the Philistines. It all starts with the Israelite troops who follow Saul. They see how desperately weak their position is against the Philistines. They also must sense the weakness of Saul's leadership. They are in serious trouble -- as our author informs us, they are "all shook up" (13:7). Does this keep God from giving Israel the victory? Certainly not! God proceeds to "shake up" the Philistines.

Imagine, if you can, the smug sense of security the Philistines must feel as they are safely hidden away at Michmash. In order for the puny Israelite army to get to them, they have to pass through the Michmash pass, and a mere 20 men can easily hold off such a force. The Philistines find their security in a narrow pass,

at the high point of the mountains, protected by massive rock, which is all well and good until an earthquake occurs. Now this former place of safety becomes the most dangerous place in the world. Saul and his watchmen look on as the Philistine army surges in one direction and then another, probably in synchronous motion with the ground which is rolling about like sea billows in a storm. All of the things which once seemed to assure them of having the edge over the Israelites turn into liabilities. In the panic and motion, their swords kill one another, not the Israelites. Their horses and chariots are useless as in their terror the animals refuse to obey, gaping cracks appear in the ground, and rock falls from the sides of the pass above. Absolute panic prevails everywhere preventing any attack and hindering any retreat. The Philistines become their own worst enemies, killing one another in the insanity of these moments.

Conclusion

What an incredible passage from which to draw several principles and their implications for us as Christians today.

The *first* area of instruction and application which leaps from this passage is the subject of leadership. In Christian circles today, the subject of leadership is a major area of thought, writing, and discussion. Sadly, much of the teaching on leadership in those Christian circles is simply sanctified, warmed-over secular *theory* on leadership. Since there is no end to such material, we need not restate the secular wisdom on leadership. Saul and Jonathan provide us with both negative and positive examples of spiritual leadership. The words *trust* and *obey* may not sum up all there is to say about the Christian life, but they certainly describe two vitally important dimensions. Saul is a man of little faith. The word “fear” seems to better characterize this man. He is afraid to tell his uncle that Samuel has anointed him as king of Israel. He hides in the luggage when he knows he will be publicly selected as the king. He is afraid he will lose all of his troops, and so he forces himself to offer the burnt offerings. And it seems that he is so afraid to take on the Philistines that he does as little as possible to attack or provoke them.

The “Saul” we see in chapter 11 is the “new Saul” which God brings to pass as the Spirit comes mightily upon him. But this Saul does not seem to last beyond chapter 11. It is the “old Saul” we find elsewhere. It is the “old Saul” we see described in chapters 13 and 14. When the “new Saul” summons the Israelites to war, 330,000 report for duty. When the “old Saul” summons Israel to Gilgal, only a small fraction of this number report, and many of those who do report desert out of fear. Saul’s fear is contagious. Since he does not trust and obey God, his followers do not trust or obey him.

How different Jonathan is -- here is a man of faith. He trusts God to give him the victory over the Philistine garrison in chapter 13. He is willing to take on the Philistines in the Michmash pass, even when it involves scaling a rocky crag with his armour, accompanied only by his one servant. This is a man who trusts God regardless of what the odds appear to be. And here is a man whom his armour bearer is willing to follow into battle, even when it looks like suicide. Why? I believe it is because Jonathan is not only a man of personal faith, but a man whose faith is contagious. Those around Saul tremble because he trembles. Those close to Jonathan trust God because he trusts God.

This leads to a very simple definition of spiritual leadership:

Spiritual leadership begins with a man's faith in God, which compels him to obediently take action in the face of obstacles and opposition, and motivates others to follow him in his obedience.

Ultimately spiritual leadership is not about looks, charm, or motivational and management techniques. Spiritual leadership is about men and women who trust God and obey His word, and in so doing, attract others to trust and obey with them. Saul is not a spiritual leader; Jonathan is.

A *second* application pertains to our appraisal of the success of leaders. Let me try to state this as a principle:

When leaders succeed, it is ultimately due to the grace of God, and often may be the result of the faithfulness of others whose supportive ministry is not nearly so evident.

Consider these verses which speak of the success of Saul's leadership:

47 Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment. 48 And he acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them (1 Samuel 14:47-48).

I do not want to take away all credit from Saul, but I do believe our text makes it very clear that Saul is successful because of the grace of God, not because of his skill, courage, or greatness. And the victory Israel wins over the Philistines is not due to Saul's initiative, but the initiative of his son. How many times are those heralded as great leaders the recipients of praise which belongs to those who, behind the scenes, make them great? Many are those who seek the spotlight. *Blessed are those who make those in authority over them look good, while standing clear of the spotlight.*

A *third* area of application is the relationship between faith and action. By contrast, Jonathan and Saul illustrate the way faith should behave. Faith is sometimes evident by our waiting, rather than by our working. Faith waits when our work would be disobedience. Abraham should have waited for his promised son, rather than working to obtain one through Hagar. Saul should have waited, rather than work at offering the burnt offerings. When there is no way for us to work in faith and obedience, we should wait for God to work in a way that provides for our needs.

At other times, we are inclined to wait when faith should be evidenced by our works. Saul, who could not wait for Samuel (even though commanded to do so), is more than willing to wait to rid Israel of their bondage to the Philistines, who not only occupy their land (their garrisons) but economically oppress the Israelites by their monopoly on iron working. A farmer could not go even make a living without paying too much for his iron implements, and then paying over and over for maintaining them (sharpening). Saul seems very intent on maintaining the status quo with the Philistines. He can (and apparently does) wait indefinitely to drive out the Philistines. Here is needed action which requires faith, but Saul wants to wait. His attacks on the Philistine garrisons provoke the military confrontation which results in the defeat of the Philistines - and in the glory of God. *How often we wait when we should be working and work when we should be waiting.* How do we know when to work? *When God's Word instructs us to do so.* When do we wait? *When God's Word instructs us to do so, and when working evidences our lack of faith and disobedience.*

Fourth, along with many others in the Bible, our text gives us a whole new perspective on situations which appear to be impossible. Here, as elsewhere, God brings His people into circumstances which seem impossible. Again, we find a very important principle illustrated in our text:

God purposely brings men into “impossible” situations to make it perfectly clear that we cannot save ourselves, and He delivers us in a way that brings Him all the glory for doing so.

Elsewhere in the Bible we read:

8 “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images” (Isaiah 42:8).

So many times in the Bible God places men in impossible situations so that He can save them in such a way that He receives the glory for having done so. He promised a child to Abram and Sarai, who, humanly speaking, were “**dead**” with respect to their ability to have children (see Romans 4:19), and they had a child. Jesus knew that Lazarus was sick, but He deliberately waited until he was

dead to go to his grave (see John 11), so that He might show His power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead.

God loves to show His strength through our weaknesses. Chapter 13 of 1 Samuel shows Israel and Saul in all their weakness. The Israelite soldiers are vastly outnumbered by the Philistines and desperately outclassed in terms of their weapons. In spite of what appears to be a hopeless situation, God brings about a significant victory over the Philistines. And this happens because two men (one without a sword) trust God enough to take on the Philistines. God turns the trembling of the Israelites into the trembling of an earthquake, so powerful that it brings confusion and chaos into the ranks of the Philistines, and most of those who die at the edge of the sword die at the hand of their Philistine brethren.

Many Christians seem to have faith when victory appears possible through merely human effort, but they collapse when circumstances appear impossible. We should learn from Jonathan that God's victory is not contingent upon our strength, and from the apostle Paul that His strength is manifested through our weaknesses (see 1 Samuel 14:6; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

The emphasis in secular circles (and unfortunately evangelical circles as well) is upon the "power of positive thinking." Perhaps there is an element of truth in all of this, but there is also a significant error. God is not limited by our abilities as the deliverance of Saul, Jonathan, and Israel from the Philistines demonstrates. And God is not limited by our imagination or our thoughts either.

9 But just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

God brings sinners to the point of despair and hopelessness (in their circumstances, in their "self- righteousness" and in their sin) so that they will cease trusting in themselves and turn to Him for salvation. What no man has ever been able to do to save himself, Jesus Christ has done on the cross of Calvary. He lived a perfect life of obedience to God. He died, not for His own sins, but for the sins of men. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and He offers to sinful and unworthy men the gift of His righteousness and eternal life. Jesus paid

it all. All we need do is to admit our sin, our unworthiness, and our utter inability to save ourselves. What is impossible for men is possible for God:

27 But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Have you come to the end of yourself? Have you seen that earning God's favor and getting to heaven are humanly impossible? If so, this is a blessing, if you then trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation.

Let us conclude our study by praising God with the apostle Paul for His wisdom in accomplishing things we thought impossible, through means we could never imagine:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36).¹

1 Samuel 14:15-52

Shaking Up the Enemy

(14:15-23)

15 And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling. 16 Now Saul's watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude melted away; and they went here and *there*. 17 And Saul said to the people who *were* with him, "Number now and see who has gone from us." And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armor bearer were not *there*. 18 Then Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here." For the ark of God was at that time with the sons of Israel. 19 And it happened while Saul talked to the priest, that the commotion in the camp of the Philistines continued and increased; so Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." 20 Then Saul and all the people who *were* with him rallied and came to the battle; and behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, *and there was* very great confusion. 21 Now the Hebrews *who* were with the Philistines previously, who went up with them all around in the camp, even they also *turned* to be with the Israelites who *were* with Saul and Jonathan. 22 When all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines

had fled, even they also pursued them closely in the battle. 23 So the LORD delivered Israel that day, and the battle spread beyond Beth-aven.

The Philistines get the message too, even more loudly and more emphatically. Even a “normal” earthquake (if there is such a thing) would have rattled the Philistines, but this one seems extraordinary. The timing is perfect, coming immediately after the limited victory of Jonathan and his servant. The earthquake seems limited to the places where the Philistines are stationed. Our text offers no indication that the Israelites feel, or are, terrified by this quake. In fact, it seems possible from our account that the Israelites are not even completely aware of what causes such panic among the Philistines. It is an earthquake from God, and its impact is terrifying.*

Think of what might have happened that day. Word reaches the ears of the main camp that someone (Jonathan and his armor bearer) has attacked the outpost and caused numerous casualties. The “**raiders,**” or destroyers, sent out to kill and destroy, are terrified. These are the “special forces” of that day. The main camp is on full alert, and the troops are called into battle formation. With their dreaded swords drawn and facing outward (something like fixed bayonets), the army moves toward the battle sight. Just then, the roar of the earthquake terrifies the troops. As they march ahead, the ground shakes and rolls beneath them. Men begin to fall. And then, if the ground moves horizontally, the swords of those behind pierce the unprotected backs of the men ahead of them. The man ahead, in a panic and perhaps thinking it is the enemy behind, turns and attacks the person behind – so that many lay dead, all by “friendly fire.”

I may not have all the details correct, but the results are similar. The Philistines are disabled and terrified by the earthquake. In sheer panic, they turn on one another and kill each other with their swords. All these casualties are the result of in-fighting among the Philistines, before the Israelites engage them in battle. It is indeed a “**panic sent by God**” (1 Samuel 14:15, NIV). We should be awe-struck by this mighty intervention of God on Israel’s behalf. His watchmen look on as God brings chaos and defeat to the mighty Philistine army. They may not know this is caused by an earthquake, but they can see the soldiers moving this way and that, in waves. Is this by the ground moving? Is this by the ground opening up? We do not know, and I doubt the Israelite watchmen knew. But from what they see and hear, they know something marvelous is happening.

The reader wonders at Saul’s response. The first thing he does is number his troops, not in order to set out for battle, but to learn who is absent. I disagree with the way the translators of the New King James Version render verse 17:

17 Then Saul said to the people who *were* with him, “Now call the roll and see who has gone from us.” And when they had called the roll,

surprisingly, Jonathan and his armorbearer *were* not *there* (1 Samuel 14:17, NKJV).

The word “**behold**” in the New American Standard Version is by far the most common way of translating this Hebrew expression. The term can be an expression of surprise, which is the way the NKJV takes it. I see it quite the opposite. While I am most reticent to offer my own translations, I think the overall context and the Hebrew term itself bears out this rendering:

17 And so Saul said to those who were with him, “Please number the troops so we can see who has gone out from among us.” And they numbered them and *sure enough* Jonathan and his armour bearer were gone (my translation/paraphrase of 1 Samuel 14:17).

Saul is not surprised. When the troops are numbered, the results are exactly as he fears. Think about it. Everything is going well enough with the Philistines (by Saul’s standards), until Jonathan messes everything up by attacking the Philistine garrison at Geba (1 Samuel 13:3). This whole disaster (as Saul sees it) with the massive build up of Philistine soldiers at Michmash is Jonathan’s fault. He cannot leave well enough alone. Now, as the two armies are encamped and at war with each other, Saul manages to avoid further action (there he sits, under that pomegranate tree (14:2), and suddenly there is a major disturbance among the Philistines. Something has to cause this commotion. Saul does not think first of God, but of his trouble-making son, Jonathan. By numbering the troops, he is able to find out who is not among them, and thus deduce who has caused him all this trouble -- again.

At long last, Saul decides to consult God – now that he is “between a rock and a hard place,” as we say in Texas. There were various ways to discern the will of God in those days. Of course, a prophet could speak directly for God, but Samuel has left Saul at Gilgal due to his disobedience (see 13:8-14). And there is the ephod, worn and used by the priest, which is there with Ahijah the priest (14:3), but Saul does not call for its use. Instead, Saul calls for the Ark of God. In some way that involves the outstretched hand of Ahijah the priest, the will of God will be made known. It seems as though this process takes some time. If this were an electronic device (tube-type, of course), it would be “warming up.” We all know Saul is not big on patience (see chapter 13). The commotion in the Philistine camp becomes so great that even Saul concludes an attack against them means certain victory for Israel. So he instructs the priest to withdraw his hand, to “turn off the will of God machine.” Saul and his men then go after these panic-stricken Philistines, who are killing each other off. As the Israelite soldiers draw near, they can see even more clearly the victory God has wrought.

The reluctant warriors go to battle against the Philistines. Jonathan and his armour bearer lead the charge; Saul rather reluctantly follows, well after a victory is assured. Joining with Saul and his 600 men are those who deserted the ranks of Saul's army and sold their services to the Philistines (14:21). When those who fled from Saul and hid themselves in the hills see the defeat and retreat of the Philistines, they too join with Saul so that his forces multiply that day.

Saul's Foolish Oath

(14:24-28)

24 Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed^a on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food. 25 And all *the people of* the land entered the forest, and there was honey on the ground. 26 When the people entered the forest, behold, *there was* a flow of honey; but no man put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. 27 But Jonathan had not heard when his father put the people under oath; therefore, he put out the end of the staff that *was* in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. 28 Then one of the people answered and said, "Your father strictly put the people under oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food today.'" And the people were weary. 29 Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. 30 "How much more, if only the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great."

It is a defeat for the Philistines and a victory for God, but it is not the victory it could have been; it could have been much more decisive. In verses 24-30, the author explains why the victory falls short of what it could and should have been. In short, the Israelite soldiers are "hard-pressed" that day, so that they cannot pursue and destroy more Philistines. The one responsible for Israel's distress is none other than their king, Saul. It is his foolish oath which hinders the Israelite soldiers.

It seems that Saul's image suffers greatly, ever since his impressive defeat of the Ammonites at Jabesh-gilead in chapter 11. Saul has been humiliated by the Philistines, not only by their occupation of Israel, but by the way they capitalize on their iron age technology (13:19-23). Much of Saul's embarrassment is the direct result of Jonathan's initiative in attacking the Philistines. Now that he sees the Philistines suffering defeat at the hand of the Israelites, Saul determines to

make them pay for his humiliation. His fight with the Philistines becomes personal. It is not God's battle, or even Israel's battle; it is his battle and his victory. And so Saul puts his men under an oath: no one is to eat until evening. The men are to fight on an empty stomach. Saul appears to reason that this will avoid wasting valuable time (and daylight?) by stopping to prepare and then eat a meal. (Since Saul has not really planned this battle, neither he nor his men are really prepared for the day's events.) There are no ready rations for the men to eat on the run, or so it appears to Saul. So he forbids his men to eat all day long and to fight the entire day without nourishment.

Saul is wrong on two counts. *First*, he is wrong in thinking his order will produce a greater victory for the Israelites over the Philistines. It seems to Saul that his orders will result in more time in pursuit during the precious daylight hours, and thus more Philistines will be killed. It doesn't work out that way. As the Philistines seek to retreat toward their own land, the battle spreads eastward, first to Beth-aven (14:23) and then to Aijalon (14:31). The Israelites pursue the Philistines over 20 miles of mountainous territory, and this without food. The Israelites become weary and weak with hunger and are not able to pursue their enemies as vigorously as they might if properly nourished.

Saul is wrong on yet a *second* account. He is wrong to suppose that the only way for the Israelite warriors to be fed is by means of a "home-cooked meal," which will take a long time. After all, this is not the day of "fast food," and Saul does not think there is any hope of obtaining a quick boost of energy. He is wrong. God has the "fastest" food available. He has strategically placed a flow of honey in the forest, and it takes no time at all to eat this honey. The soldiers, like Jonathan, only need to thrust their staff in the midst of the honey, take it out and place it in their mouths. There is no faster or finer food around. This is the finest, most natural nutrition for which anyone could hope. It makes "Gatorade" look pathetic.

Jonathan does not hear of Saul's order until it is too late. He is too busy attacking and fighting the Philistines to sit around the camp waiting for Saul to pass an edict. And so as he pursues the Philistines, he is joined by Saul's forces. When Jonathan nourishes himself with some honey, one of Saul's men informs him of Saul's foolish order. Jonathan says what most of us should be thinking by now: "My father has troubled the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey" (14:29). His father is foolish and selfish to withhold nutrition from his men. Were the Israelites able to do as Jonathan has done, their victory would be much greater. Saul is not the source of Israel's military successes, but a hindrance to them. Israel's victories are more in spite of their king than a result of his leadership. All the Israelite soldiers must think this, and Jonathan simply has the courage to say it.

Saul, a Stumbling Block to Israel

(14:31-35)

31 And they struck among the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very weary. 32 And the people rushed greedily upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves, and slew *them* on the ground; and the people ate *them* with the blood. 33 Then they told Saul, saying, “Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood.” And he said, “You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today.” 34 And Saul said, “Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, ‘Each one of you bring me his ox or his sheep, and slaughter *it* here and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.’” So all the people that night brought each one his ox with him, and slaughtered *it* there. 35 And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD.

It is bad enough when Saul’s foolishness keeps the Israelites from decisively winning, but it is inexcusable when his order results in sinning. Obediently, the Israelites comply with Saul’s senseless order not to eat until evening. And, due to fatigue, fewer Philistines are killed. But as the day comes to a close, the people are famished when they come upon the cattle left behind by their enemies. It is sad to say that the Israelite soldiers fear disobeying Saul’s commands more than they fear disobeying God’s commands. The famished soldiers devour the livestock without properly preparing them, and in so doing, they sin (Leviticus 17:10; 19:26).

Someone informs Saul that Israel is sinning in this fashion (14:33). One almost wonders if Saul would have even realized the seriousness of the situation had it not been pointed out to him. Rather than take responsibility for being a “stumbling block” to his fellow Israelites, Saul self-righteously points his accusing finger at his famished men: “You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today” (14:33b). This is damage control with respect to the damage Saul himself precipitates by his foolish command. At least Saul is concerned about keeping his men from sinning further.

Two things are strangely ironic about the fact that Saul builds an altar of stone that night on which the Israelites sacrifice their “offerings.” *First*, one can hardly call this sincere worship, either on the part of the Israelites or on the part of Saul. It is merely a way of sanctifying the satisfaction of the appetites of these soldiers so that they do not sin any more. And when we are told this is the first altar Saul has built, we are not impressed either. Does it take this kind of crisis for Saul to seek to worship his God? Does he only build altars in times of crisis? I would not call this a “holy moment” in Israel’s history. They are simply

covering their bets, minimizing the damage caused by sin, sin predisposed by Saul and practiced by his soldiers.

Second, this is a most ironic “meal.” Saul forbids his soldiers to eat before evening, although the “fast food” God provides will not cause more than a minutes delay (as we see from the fact that Jonathan satisfies himself on the move). Saul feels that eating will be a waste of time and hinder Israel’s ability to win a decisive victory. Yet the Israelites have pursued their enemies into the night, except that they are so hungry and so tempted by the spoils of war that they sin in the way they eat it. To correct the situation, Saul has to build an altar and then be sure each man’s sacrifice is properly slain and prepared. How long do you think this “meal” took? This is inefficiency!

Saul is Quick to Kill – His Son

(14:36-45)

36 Then Saul said, “Let us go down after the Philistines by night and take spoil among them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them.” And they said, “Do whatever seems good to you.” So the priest said, “Let us draw near to God here.” 37 And Saul inquired of God, “Shall I go down after the Philistines? Wilt Thou give them into the hand of Israel?” But He did not answer him on that day. 38 And Saul said, “Draw near here, all you chiefs of the people, and investigate and see how this sin has happened today. 39 “For as the LORD lives, who delivers Israel, though it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die.” But not one of all the people answered him. 40 Then he said to all Israel, “You shall be on one side and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side.” And the people said to Saul, “Do what seems good to you.” 41 Therefore, Saul said to the LORD, the God of Israel, “Give a perfect *lot*.” And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. 42 And Saul said, “Cast *lots* between me and Jonathan my son.” And Jonathan was taken. 43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” So Jonathan told him and said, “I indeed tasted a little honey with the end of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am, I must die!” 44 And Saul said, “May God do this *to me* and more also, for you shall surely die, Jonathan.” 45 But the people said to Saul, “Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.” So the people rescued Jonathan and he did not die.

Finally, after a record wait for dinner, the meal is finished. Now Saul is ready to fight – but is God? Saul orders his men back to battle to do further damage to the Philistine army and obtain further spoils. The people are with Saul in this

matter. They are ready to return to the war. But the priest is not quite as certain. He strongly urges that God's will be sought first. When Saul inquires of God, he expects a "yes" or "no" answer to his question, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Wilt Thou give them into the hand of Israel?"

Saul jumps to a number of false conclusions. First, he concludes that since he has not been given an answer, it must be that someone has sinned. It does not seem to occur to him that the sin may be his own or that of his soldiers eating meat not properly drained of its blood. He assumes there has been sin, and that this sin is the violation of his foolish order (not God's Law). Furthermore, he assumes that it may well be Jonathan who is guilty of this sin. And finally, Saul concludes that this "sin" is worthy of death. I do not think it is a coincidence that Saul says, "For as the Lord lives, who delivers Israel, though it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die" (verse 39). Why, of all the thousands of men with him, does Saul focus upon Jonathan, his son? I fear that I know why, and I don't like it at all. I believe Saul's son, Jonathan, is a man very much like David. In war, Saul concludes that Jonathan is a nuisance at best and a liability for sure. I believe Saul is looking for an excuse to do away with Jonathan, and this situation seems perfectly suited for the occasion. Before the lot is cast, Saul makes it clear that if Jonathan is selected, he will die. I think he knows Jonathan will be selected.

As far as the biblical record, Saul narrows this matter down very quickly and arbitrarily. He and his son Jonathan are set off against the rest of the soldiers. Not surprisingly, he and Jonathan are selected. Then Saul has the lot cast between Jonathan and himself, and Jonathan is indicated. The people acquiesce in this process, at least for the moment (see verse 40). Who will oppose Saul in his state of mind? When Jonathan is isolated by the casting of lots, his father asks him what he has done. (It is interesting, is it not, that Saul has already indicated the punishment before the crime is revealed.) Jonathan "confesses" that he has indeed tasted a little honey with the end of his staff. One small taste of honey, taken without any knowledge of his father's command and without wasting any time, is the heinous crime Saul supposes is the reason for Israel's inability to finish the battle which Jonathan started. Saul seems to feel it is better to kill his son than admit his own sin and foolishness.

Even here, Jonathan is a model son. He makes no excuses, nor does he make any indictments against his father, foolish though he is. Jonathan places his life in the hands of his father, the king. He is willing to die if that is his father's will, if that is God's will. With great flair, Saul once again pontificates about the certainty of Jonathan's death. It is as though Saul could righteously do nothing less.

Finally, the people who have quietly put up with all the king's dramatics have had enough. They are willing to let Saul put Jonathan and himself to the test (verse 40), but they are not willing to allow Saul to put his son to death. They see how foolish Saul's actions are. Jonathan, not Saul, brought about such a great deliverance for them (verse 45). Should he be put to death for this? He has worked with God and not against Him, and because of this he will not be put to death as a sinner. Quite the contrary! Not one hair on his head shall fall to the ground. And so it is that Jonathan, working with God, rescues Israel, and Israel, standing up to Saul, rescues Jonathan. Saul, who rescues no one, is not allowed to destroy his own son. With this incident, the battle with the Philistines ends, sooner and less decisively than it should, all due to the foolishness of Saul, Israel's "deliverer."

Signing off with Saul's "Success" and Successors

(14:46-52)

46 Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place. 47 Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment. 48 And he acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them. 49 Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan and Ishvi and Malchi-shua; and the names of his two daughters *were these*: the name of the first-born Merab and the name of the younger Michal. 50 And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the captain of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51 And Kish *was* the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner *was* the son of Abiel. 52 Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he attached him to his staff.

There is a sense in which this chapter is a kind of benediction with respect to Saul's life and reign as king of Israel. There is a summing up of his apparent successes, a clear allusion to his failings, and a listing of his descendants. Chapter 15 describes the sin which spells the end of Saul's reign (the earlier sin spelled the end of Saul's dynasty – the reign of his descendants). Later chapters introduce David as Saul's replacement and show Saul's jealousy and opposition to him. The last chapter of 1 Samuel describes the death of Saul and his son. But this chapter seems to be the benediction on Saul and his reign.

The battle is over, but the war is not. The Philistines suffer a great loss, but not a total defeat. Each army – the Israelites and the Philistines – goes its own way.

For the rest of Saul's life, these two nations continue at war with each other. This is especially emphasized in verse 52:

52 Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he attached him to his staff.

For the remainder of Saul's life there will be conflict, and Saul's respect for the Philistines can be seen by the fact that he seeks to attach any "**valiant man**" to his staff. The consequences for Saul's folly follow him all the days of his reign. As we shall read in chapter 31, Saul and his son Jonathan both die at the hands of the Philistines. How sad that the victory over the Philistines is not complete in this battle which Jonathan began.

I have been speaking of Saul as a foolish man and as a failure. How can we explain the appraisal of Saul's reign in verses 47 and 48, which seems to put Saul in a positive light? The answer is at least two-fold. *First*, it seems safe to say that a man can be a moral and spiritual failure, and yet be a great military leader. Look at the men whom God uses in the Book of Judges to deliver His people. Samson is no moral giant, but he is used of God to deliver Israel from the hand of her enemies. The same can be said for many of the other judges whom God raised up. God is not restricted to using godly people to accomplish His promises and purposes. Thus, military victory can be achieved through a man like Saul in spite of the kind of man he is. How many of us attribute God's grace and mercy in our lives to our goodness and merit?

Second, the things said in these two verses are in fact true, and they represent the appraisal of Saul's leadership from a secular historian's point of view. Saul, as Israel's king, does fight against all of the surrounding nations, and he does inflict punishment on these nations. With respect to his warfare with the Amalakites, Saul does act valiantly and delivers Israel from those who plunder them.

It seems that the battle between Israel and the Philistines, depicted in chapters 13 and 14, is typical of the whole of Saul's life and reign as king of Israel. Saul does fight with the Philistines, and the Israelites win. The battle is fought under Saul's leadership. But the victory was not what it could have been due to Saul's foolishness. And the battle is not the result of Saul's faith and initiative, but of Jonathan's. Nevertheless, as we read in 13:4, the word is sent out that Saul "**had smitten the garrison of the Philistines.**" From a historian's point of view, the victories of Israel under Saul's watch are Saul's victories. We know these victories were by the grace of God, often due to the actions of others like Jonathan, and often in spite of the inaction and foolishness of Saul.

In spite of the “victories” of Saul and Israel, the Philistines are never destroyed, never finally decisively defeated so that Saul and Israel contend with the Philistines throughout his reign. Depending on the “**arm of the flesh**,” it seems, Saul seeks heroes who will do warfare for him and for Israel. The stage is most certainly set for David and the role he will play in the battle with the Philistines and with Goliath, their champion.

Conclusion

First, it is not difficult at all to see why Jonathan and David will become devoted friends.

They are indeed kindred spirits. Jonathan is a man of faith and spiritual insight. He is a man who acts boldly, out of his faith in God, while his father waits for the bad times to blow over. Jonathan would have made a great king, but he is a Benjamite and not a descendant of Judah; thus none of his descendants could be the Messiah. But when Jonathan sees that God’s hand is on David, he is one of the very first Israelites to embrace him as the next king of Israel, and this he does without jealousy or hesitation.

Second, this text sets the stage for the introduction of David in chapters 16 and 17.

The character of Saul is already evident. His foolishness and jealousy, directed against David, comes as no surprise to us because these have already been displayed in his dealings with his own son, Jonathan. Saul has already attempted to put Jonathan to death; we will not be surprised to see him attempt to kill David and others as well. As Saul is reluctant to take on the Philistines in the early days, so he will be reticent to take them on when Goliath is their champion. There will be little that surprises us about Saul in the following chapters, because of what we have already read in these earlier chapters of 1 Samuel.

Third, we see that history’s view of a man may differ greatly from God’s. Man’s assessment of his fellow man is by no means accurate.

It is by no means the true “measure of a man” so far as God is concerned, because when God judges a man, He looks on the heart. Secular history may judge Saul to be a success, but in biblical and spiritual terms, he is a miserable failure. Secular benchmarks of success are hardly an indication of God’s approval or blessing. The author of 1 Samuel wants us to see Saul as a man who is rejected by God. How sad it is to be esteemed by the world and despised by God. How much better, if need be, to be despised by the world, and esteemed by God (see 1 Peter 4).

Fourth, we see in this text that Christians can and do act in ways that apparently hinder the full or complete success of the work of God.

In the ultimate sense, men cannot thwart that which God has purposed and promised to do. God uses men's faith and obedience to accomplish His purposes, but He is not limited to this means. God's sovereignty enables Him to also employ man's unbelief and disobedience to achieve His purposes (see Genesis 50:20; Psalm 76:10). He even employs Satan to achieve His purposes (see 2 Corinthians 12:5-10). But having affirmed God's sovereignty over all things, it must also be said that God sometimes allows the actions (or inactions) of men to hinder what could have been (see 2 Kings 13:14-19). God is sovereign over history, but in His sovereign control of all things, God has ordained that actions have consequences, and man's disobedience and lack of faith may result in less than what could and should have been, had we acted in a godly way. Saul most certainly illustrates this by the way his folly in chapter 14 hinders a complete victory over the Philistines.

Fifth, Saul's rule is the source of great trouble for Israel, but it is also the means to his own demise.

We know from chapter 14 that Saul's foolish rule prevents Israel from winning a crushing victory over the Philistines. Consequently, all the rest of Saul's days, he and the nation are plagued by the Philistines (verse 52). The Philistine attack in chapter 17 launches David's rise to prominence in Israel and the beginning of the end for Saul. Israel's battle with the Philistines in chapter 31 results in the deaths of both Saul and Jonathan. As we read in the Song of Solomon, it is **"the little foxes that spoil the vineyards"** (2:15). This seemingly insignificant moment of folly has serious consequences for Israel and her king.

Finally, we see in our text an excellent illustration of legalism.

Having a zeal to know and obey God's commands is not legalism; it is discipleship. All too often I hear someone refer to the preaching of God's commands (Old Testament or New) as "legalism." While some may become legalistic in the way they seek to obey God's commands, a zeal to know and do God's commands is not legalism. Psalm 119 is an excellent example of a godly man's zeal to know and to obey God's commands. *The love for God's law is not legalism.*

Legalism is a discontent with God's commandments as they are. Legalism supposes that God's commands and prohibitions do not go far enough. Legalism seeks to fix this "problem" by adding more rules and regulations. These added instructions are held as dearly as the commands of Scripture (sometimes more

so). Those who fail to abide by these legalistic rules are judged severely by those who embrace them.

Let me illustrate legalism from the New Testament. The Law of Moses required men to keep the Sabbath, and this did mean that the Sabbath was to be a day of rest. It did not mean that it was sinful for Jesus' disciples to reach down and pluck a few heads of grain and eat them. It did not mean that it was sinful for our Lord to heal a sick person on the Sabbath. The scribes and Pharisees could not indict our Lord for breaking any of God's laws; they could only accuse Him for breaking the Old Testament Laws as they interpreted and applied them, and as they amended them with their own traditions. To seek to "improve" on God's laws by adding to them was to set oneself above the Law as its judge:

11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge *of it*. 12 There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbour? (James 4:11-12, NASB).

As I understand this text in James, those who wrongly "**judge**" their brothers usually do so on the basis of their own legalistic rules, and not according to God's Word. James says that those who judge others by their own rules also judge God's Law as inadequate.

King Saul is a legalist. As the king of Israel, Saul should have known the Law of God well, and carefully set out to obey it and to see that it was obeyed in his kingdom (see Deuteronomy 17:18-20). It almost seems as though Saul would not have recognized a breaking of God's law unless someone else pointed it out to him (see 1 Samuel 14:33). Saul can easily justify his own neglect in carrying out the commands of God, and yet he is ready – almost eager – to put his own son to death for breaking one of his own foolish commands. Like all legalists, Saul finds it easy to strain gnats and swallow camels (see Matthew 23:23-24). Saul oozes with righteous indignation when others break his rules, but he is most tolerant of his own flagrant transgressions of God's commands.

Contrary to what legalists assume, legalism does not hinder sin; it promotes it. The prohibitions which legalists heap upon themselves and others are not a cure for fleshly indulgence (Colossians 2:20-23). There were those in New Testament times who forbade marriage and the eating of certain foods (1 Timothy 4:3), but these were deceivers and liars who sought to turn God's people from the truth. While Paul was single, he instructed husbands and wives not to abstain from sex, unless it was for an important reason and only for a limited time. Legalism sets men up to fall, as Saul's legalistic rule set the Israelites up to sin by eating

meat that had not been properly slaughtered. Let us beware of legalism, in all of its most pious forms.

One final word. The contrast between Saul and Jonathan in our text can hardly be ignored. Jonathan is what Saul is not. Let us not forget that Jonathan is Saul's son. It is not Saul's "good parenting" which makes Jonathan what he is. Jonathan's godliness is in spite of Saul, not because of him. Let those who would like to take credit for the way their children have turned out take note. And let us note also that many godly parents have borne ungodly children. I think, for example, of Samson and his parents (see Judges 13:1-23, especially verse 8).

Up until now, I have been inclined to look at Saul as an anomaly, as a kind of exceptional case. His sins are more public, more visible, and perhaps more dramatic than ours, but in the final analysis, his temptations and failures are really "**common to man**" (see 1 Corinthians 10:13; James 5:17). His failures are not recorded so that we can love to hate this man. I believe they are recorded as a warning to us, so that we need not repeat the sins which he so obviously commits. I would like to think that my life is reflected more in Jonathan than in his father, but this is often not the case. Let us listen and learn well from these two very different men, Saul and Jonathan. And let us endeavour to faithfully serve God by obeying His commands, so that we do not become negative examples of folly for future generations.

1 Samuel 15:1-35

15. Saul's second great failure

Verses 1-8. Saul's commission to exterminate Amalek

Verses 9-31. Saul's disobedience and rejection

Verses 32-33. Destruction of Agag

Verses 34-35. Samuel separates from Saul

The Command to Kill the Amalekites

The Amalekites, a name which might sound vaguely familiar to the reader of the Bible, may be foreign to us, but these people are not strangers to the Israelites. The Amalekites are one of the peoples dwelling in the southern part of Canaan. When the Israelites left Egypt and set out toward Canaan (see Exodus 17:8ff.), they were one of the first nations the Israelites encountered. This is one of the surrounding nations with which Israel has continual conflict. The Amalekites attack the Israelites, who disobediently seek to possess the promised land after

their unbelief at Kadesh-barnea (see Numbers 14:25, 43, 45). They join with the Midianites in attacking and plundering Israel, and are one of the nations which pose such a serious threat to Israel that Gideon needs reassurance of God's presence with him in battle (see Judges 6:3, 33; 7:12). This is the nation David attacks, which overruns the city of Ziklag and captures the families and goods of David and his men (see 1 Samuel 27:8; 30:1, 18; 2 Samuel 1:1).

The command to kill an entire nation and their cattle is not new. God required the Israelites to do so when they encountered the Canaanite nations:

28 “Nevertheless, anything which a man sets apart to the LORD out of all that he has, of man or animal or of the fields of his own property, shall not be sold or redeemed. Anything devoted to destruction is most holy to the LORD. 29 ‘No one who may have been set apart among men shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death’” (Leviticus 27:28-29, NASB).

16 “Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. 17 “But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you, 18 in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 29:16-18).

15 Then it came about on the seventh day that they rose early at the dawning of the day and marched around the city in the same manner seven times; only on that day they marched around the city seven times. 16 And it came about at the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. 17 “And the city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to the LORD; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. 18 “But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, lest you covet *them* and take some of the things under the ban, so you would make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it. 19 “But all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.” 20 So the people shouted, and *priests* blew the trumpets; and it came about, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, that the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city. 21 And they utterly destroyed

everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword (Joshua 6:15-21).

Our text in 1 Samuel 15 and the passages above may pose several questions for Christian readers today. (1) Why does God order the annihilation of entire nations in the first place? (2) Why are the cattle and even innocent children to be destroyed? (3) Why are the Amalekites specifically named as those to be wiped out? (4) Why is a later generation of Amalekites punished because of the sins of an earlier generation? (5) Why is Saul's sparing of one man and a few cattle such a serious offense to God? Let us attempt to answer these questions.

First, there are general reasons for the annihilation of peoples like the Canaanites. These are the peoples who possess the promised land which God gave to Israel. The primary reason stated above is that these peoples are exceedingly wicked. If they are not totally wiped out, they will teach the Israelites their sinful ways and thus bring them under divine condemnation. It is easy to see why all the fighting men of the enemy should be killed, but why the women, children, and cattle? The sin of the Canaanites involved had defiled and corrupted their animals, and God would not allow any to survive.

Secondly, those whom God orders annihilated are those who are guilty, those for whom their punishment is just retribution. While their predecessors may have sinned greatly, the people whom God orders Saul to destroy are guilty sinners themselves, for whom their fate is a just recompense:

18 And the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated' (1 Samuel 15:18).

33 But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal (1 Samuel 15:33).

The Amalekites are *sinner*s, deserving of God's wrath through Israel. These *sinner*s, the Amalekites, are those who *made women childless*, and thus it is just for them to experience the suffering and cruelty they themselves mete out to their enemies.

Third, we are reminded that God does not take pleasure in the punishment of the innocent:

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

10 Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and *which* you did not cause to grow, which came up

overnight and perished overnight. 11 “And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (Jonah 4:9-11).

Fourth, the annihilation of the Amalekites in Saul’s day is the outworking of a command given many years earlier and reiterated several times.

Exodus 17:8-15

8 Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us, and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” 10 And Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. 13 So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. 14 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” 15 And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner; 16 and he said, “The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:1-16).

Numbers 24:20-25

20 And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said, “ Amalek was the first of the nations, But his end *shall be* destruction.” 21 And he looked at the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said, “Your dwelling place is enduring, And your nest is set in the cliff. 22 “Nevertheless Kain shall be consumed; How long shall Asshur keep you captive?” 23 And he took up his discourse and said, “Alas, who can live except God has ordained it? 24 “But ships *shall come* from the coast of Kittim, And they shall afflict Asshur and shall afflict Eber; So they also *shall come* to destruction.” 25 Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

17 “Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, 18 how he met you along the way and attacked among

you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. 19 “Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget.

When the Israelites leave Egypt and make their way toward the promised land, they are attacked by the Amalekites as depicted in Exodus 17. We know from Deuteronomy 25:18 that this attack is cowardly because they attack from behind, preying upon stragglers who are *faint and weary*. God gives the Israelites victory over the Amalekite army, but this does not wipe out the entire nation. God specifically commands that a future generation blot out the memory of this people, and this command is recorded for Israel’s posterity.

In Numbers 24, there is a most interesting reference to this “curse” which God imposes upon the Amalekites. Balak, the king of Moab, fears the Israelites and seeks to bring about their demise by hiring Balaam to curse them. Balak must be ignorant of the Abrahamic Covenant:

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3, emphasis mine).

The Amalekites did not bless the Israelites, they cursed them by attacking them along the way. Because of this, God curses them, as He had covenanted with Abraham and his descendants. Now Balak seeks to entice Balaam to “curse” Israel, the people whom God has blessed. Not only does Balaam bless Israel, he reiterates the *curse* on the Amalekites, pronounced earlier in Exodus 17. In addition to cursing the Amalekites, he blesses the Kenites, who had shown mercy to the Israelites (Numbers 24:21; see 1 Samuel 15:6). In spite of himself, Balaam must bless those whom God blesses (including those who bless Israel), and he must curse those whom God curses (those who curse Israel).

In Deuteronomy 24, the second generation of Israelites who are about to enter the promised land are reminded of the duty of their descendants to destroy the Amalekites, once the nation has established itself and won victory over its surrounding neighbours. It is interesting that the reminder that Israel must annihilate the Amalekites is found in the context of teaching on justice (see 25:1-16). By inference, the annihilation of the Amalekites is the outworking of justice.

The question may remain, “But why should this generation be destroyed when it was an earlier generation which dealt cruelly with Israel?” We have already said that the generation of Amalekites in Saul’s time is wicked and deserving of death. It seems safe to say that this later generation is even more wicked than the one which first oppressed Israel in the wilderness as depicted in Exodus 17. I understand the destruction of the Amalekites in the light of God’s words to Abraham spoken centuries earlier:

12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 13 And *God* said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 “But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 “And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 “Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:12-16).

God tells Abraham (Abram here) that He is going to give him the land of Canaan, but first his descendants will be enslaved in an unnamed land for 400 years. We know this is the land of Egypt. After the 400 years of bondage is completed, God will then give them the land of Canaan. The reason given here for this delay is that the **“iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete”** (Genesis 15:16). God chose to let the sin of this people ripen, reach its full maturity, and then bring judgment upon them. At the time God commands Saul to wipe out the Amalekites, we can safely assume their sins have ripened, and that the time for judgment has come.

In addition, we can say that God’s delay in judgment is also due to His grace, for in delaying judgment, God gives time for those whom He has chosen to be saved from His wrath:

22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And *He did so* in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory (Romans 9:22-23, NASB).

9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, NASB).

Saul's Disobedience

This chapter is about Saul's disobedience and its consequences, and so let us now ponder the nature of Saul's disobedience so we can understand the severity of the consequences.

Saul's disobedience does not stem from compassion.

We may be tempted to think that Saul disobeys the command of God out of sincere, if misguided, motivation. Perhaps we would look upon Saul's disobedience differently if we saw him sparing the little Amalekite children. But Saul does not spare one Amalekite child; he spares Agag, the king of the Amalekites. Saul does not disobey God because he is so compassionate, so caring, so kind. He readily slaughters every Amalekite man, woman, and child, save one – the king.

I think we may safely assume that Saul's sparing of Agag, along with his sparing of the best of the flocks and herds of the Amalekites, is really self-serving. Saul certainly gains a measure of popularity for allowing the Israelites to have a good sacrificial meal with the Amalekite animals. After all, this not only means they can feast on the meat; it also means they do not have to sacrifice their own animals. Sparing the life of Agag probably provides Saul with a trophy of his prowess and power. When Agag sits at Saul's table, he is much like a stuffed moose head, mounted and prominently displayed in a hunter's den. I am reminded of the words of another king recorded in the first chapter of the Book of Judges:

6 But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. 7 And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up *scraps* under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there (Judges 1:6-7).

For a king to sit at Saul's table, captive and dependent upon him for his livelihood, is to have a trophy of that king. I believe this is the reason Saul spares Agag's life and not the life of any other Amalekite.

Saul's disobedience is committed by his partial obedience.

Disobedience sometimes occurs in bold, blatant forms, such as Adam and Eve's disobedience regarding the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. But here, Saul sins by failing to obey God's commandment to the letter. Saul does most of what God instructs him to do through Samuel, but he does not obey completely. Samuel sees this incomplete obedience as sin.

Saul's disobedience is religious in nature.

Saul's disobedience is perceived and represented as obedience. I don't know how Saul justifies saving Agag's life. It does not appear very religious to me. But Saul is masterful at camouflaging his sin regarding the best of the Amalekite flocks. He says he and the people spared the best of the flocks to sacrifice to the Lord. Now, they may have indeed intended to do this, but their motivation is probably self-serving. The slaughter of all the cattle, as God has commanded, would be a sacrifice too, but the people will not be able to eat any of it. Sparing the animals as they do and then sacrificing them to God accomplishes at least two things. First, the people get a free meal at God's expense. They are able to share in the sacrificial meal (2:12-17; 9:11-25). And second, they are able to sacrifice these cattle to God in place of their own, thus avoiding any real sacrifice on their part. The point is that Saul's disobedience has a pious veneer, but at its core, it is self-serving sin. Thus, Saul's actions are hypocritical, appearing to be pious when they are pagan.

Saul's disobedience is cooperative

Saul does not act alone. When he first speaks to Samuel, he is willing to talk of his self-defined obedience in first person terms: **"I have carried out the command of the LORD"** (verse 13). But once it is apparent that his "obedience" is unacceptable to God, Saul suddenly seeks to lay the blame off on the people of Israel:

15 "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed" (verse 15).

20 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites" (verse 20).

Only after his excuses are rejected and his sin exposed by Samuel does Saul "fess" up to his role in this sin, along with the people:

24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24).

How often sin becomes a social event, encouraged and entered into by many.

Saul's disobedience is not taken seriously enough by Saul.

Saul is slow to accept responsibility for his sin, as exposed by Samuel. Even when Saul confesses his sin, he lays some of the blame off on the people and then tries – too quickly for my liking – to “move on” to the blessings of God, hoping to sidestep divine discipline. This is especially apparent in verses 24-33. In a sense, Saul is saying something like: “O.K., O.K., so I messed up. I admit it. Now, can we get on with my life. I want you to stay with me and worship with me, so that my image is not tarnished before the people.” In effect now, as in the sin of partial obedience, Saul is more concerned with the people’s opinion of him than of God’s estimation of him. Saul wants to put his sin behind him without hating it, without putting it away from him.

Saul’s sin is hypocritical

If you remember, Saul is a man who will not tolerate anyone who fails to carry out his commands, even when they are foolish and detrimental. In chapter 14, Saul’s son, Jonathan, inadvertently violates Saul’s command not to eat anything until evening. Jonathan has not heard this command as he is too busy fighting the Philistines, but Saul is determined to put him to death for this disobedience and would have done so if the people had not refused to let it happen (14:36-46). Now, when it comes to Saul’s obedience to the command of God, he is amazingly lenient on himself. Disobey God? Maybe. Disobey Saul? Never!

Saul’s disobedience is a repetition of the same kind of disobedience seen earlier in 1 Samuel.

This is the second of two major instances of Saul’s disobedience. The first comes in chapter 13, when Saul offers up the burnt offering instead of waiting for Samuel. In response to this sin, Samuel says,

13b “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 “But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:13b-14, NASB).

Now in chapter 15, we find the second instance of Saul’s disobedience:

22 And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams. 23 “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, *And* insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being king*” (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Why is the indictment of chapter 13 seemingly repeated in chapter 15? Why does Samuel tell Saul that God has rejected him as king when he has already said nearly the same thing in chapter 13? The answer is that the first statement of condemnation is a conditional prophecy which would not be carried out if Saul genuinely repented of his sin. This is what we see stated in principle by the prophet Jeremiah:

6 “Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter *does*?” declares the LORD.” Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. 7 “At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; 8 if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it” (Jeremiah 18:6-8).

This, of course, is the very thing the king of Nineveh hoped for and received:

4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered *himself* with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes. 7 And he issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. 8 “But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 “Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?” 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do *it* (Jonah 3:4-10).

There are then prophecies which are absolutely certain, prophecies which cannot be reversed or changed. And there are also prophecies which are warnings of the judgment which will come about unless men repent and are forgiven. When Joseph interprets the Pharaoh's dreams, he tells the Pharaoh that these two dreams concern one and the same thing, and this indicates that what the dreams prophesy will most certainly happen (Genesis 41:32). The words of Samuel the *prophet* in chapter 13 are a warning of judgment and the opportunity for Saul to repent. In chapter 15, we see that Saul most certainly does not repent, but

persists in his disobedience. Therefore, the words of Samuel to Saul in chapter 15 are words of Saul's certain removal from office, even though a few years in the future. This is the very thing Samuel makes clear to Saul in verse 29:

29 "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind."

How then do we square the words of verse 29 with what we have just read in verse 11?

11 "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night.

The same Hebrew term is employed in both verses 11 and 29, so we dare not attempt to solve our problem by saying the original term is not the same. What we can say is that the term employed here is found over 100 times in the Old Testament. The form employed here (*Niphal*) is translated "**repent**" 38 times in the King James Version, and most of these refer to God's "repenting."^s In the first instance of this verb (verse 11 of our text), the author speaks of God's sorrow over the way Saul's kingship has gone. It is not that God has been caught unaware or that this is not a part of His sovereign plan. God is not untouched by human sin; He is grieved by it. Even when God purposes that evil will play a part in His eternal plan, He does not enjoy it. Instead, it causes Him grief, which is what verse 11 says.

In verse 29, the same Hebrew form (*Niphal* again) is used, but the context dictates how this somewhat broad term is to be understood. When God rebukes Saul for his disobedience in chapter 13, He warns that Saul will lose his dynasty, his kingdom. This is a conditional prophecy, which could be avoided if Saul truly repents. He does not. So now, in verse 29, when Saul begs Samuel not to abandon him, not to bring the promised judgment upon him, Samuel reminds him that God is not a man who makes mistakes and then has to "repent" to change course. Samuel's indictment indicates that Saul will be removed from power. Saul pleads that it be some other way. Samuel tells him that God doesn't err in such judgments, and thus He will not "repent" of the course He has determined for Saul. It is too late, and God's mind will not be changed now, for the time for repentance has passed.

The Governing Principle

(15:22-23)

Saul seeks to excuse his disobedience by claiming that he intends to use the animals which are spared to offer sacrifices to God. Samuel will have none of

this. In verses 22 and 23, he sets down a principle which will be taken up often by later prophets, our Lord, and His apostles.* The principle is stated both positively and negatively. In verse 22, Samuel states matters positively. He informs us that while performing God's prescribed religious rituals is a good thing (especially if done with clean hands and a pure heart), obedience to God's commands is even better.

Saul says things in precisely the opposite manner. By his words and actions, Saul informs us that going through the motions of religious rituals is the most important thing of all. It is no big thing to Saul to disobey God's command, as long as his disobedience enables him to offer a ritualistic sacrifice to God. To Saul, offering a sacrifice to God is more important than obedience to God. To Samuel, obedience to God is the highest form of sacrifice (compare Romans 12:1-2). *To obey God is better than all sacrifices. To disobey God, and then offer sacrifices, is worthless.*

In verse 23 Samuel likens the sin of an Israelite to the sins of the heathen, which a good Jew would never consider doing. Saul does not take his sin of disobedience seriously. This pagan people, the Amalekites, deserves to die. Saul does not question that. The sins the pagans commit are those which an Israelite loathes. Samuel brings Saul up short by informing him that his disobedience is no less despicable than the pagan's sins of divination, iniquity or idolatry. In fact, the pagans commit their sin largely in ignorance. They do not possess the Scriptures, as do the people of God. Saul's sin of disobedience is on a par with those pagan sins Saul hates most. To obey is better than ritualistic worship; to disobey is worse than pagan idolatry or witchcraft (NKJV).

Saul's "Repentance"

(15:24-31)

It is indeed sad to read the biblical report of Saul's disobedience. But sadder still is reading the account of Saul's response to Samuel's rebuke. Saul starts by claiming to have obeyed God's command. Then, when his sin is exposed, he admits to his failure to fully execute the command, but tries to sanctify his disobedience by claiming it is to better worship God. When Samuel casts aside this weak excuse, Saul finally confesses that he has sinned, but he lays some of the blame on the people. He claims that he feared the people and thus gave in to the pressure they applied on him. (verse 24). His concern is not that he has sinned against a righteous God, but that his public image will be damaged if Samuel openly severs his relationship with him. He does not have a deep conviction concerning the vileness of his sin. He only fears that he will look bad if this situation is not handled properly. And so he pleads for Samuel to go back and worship with him, thus giving the appearance that all is well.

Samuel Fully Carries out God's Command

1 Samuel 15:32-35

32 Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." 33 But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the LORD at Gilgal. 34 Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. 35 And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Saul sins in chapter 13 when he offers the burnt offering which is Samuel's task. But now, in chapter 15, it is necessary for Samuel to carry out Saul's task. And in this instance it is not sin. Saul seems unwilling to "repent," to reverse his decision to let king Agag live. This being the case, Samuel carries out the command of God himself, for it is necessary that all of the Amalekites be put to death, especially the king who led them in their wickedness. Agag is brought forward. This king feels confident that since he has not been executed by now, the danger is over. He certainly feels that he is safe while in the custody of Saul. But his confidence is ill-founded. Samuel is now the one he must stand before, and Samuel acts in God's behalf.^s As he, the commander-in-chief of the Amalekite army, made women childless, so now his mother will be childless by his death (verse 33). Samuel does not merely put Agag to death, he hews him in pieces, no doubt because this is the way he dealt with the foes he defeated. While the text does not inform us of this, it is likely that Samuel sees to it that all of the Amalekites' cattle, which the Israelites spared, are also put to death.

We are not told that Saul ever truly grieves over his sin or even over his parting ways with Samuel. It is a sad day for Samuel, however. He had wept and interceded with the Lord all night before he rebuked Saul (15:11). He grieves over Saul after they part company (15:35). And the Lord too grieved over Saul, and over the fact that He had made Saul king over Israel. It comes as no surprise to God, for this had been a part of the plan made in eternity past. Saul cannot be the king from whom Messiah will come, for he is not of the Tribe of Judah but of the tribe of Benjamin. Nevertheless God grieves over having to set Saul aside. It is necessary, but it is not a source of joy. Do we think that the God who is all-powerful does only the things which make Him happy? God does things which cause Him sorrow, like making Saul king, and like sending His Son to die on the cross of Calvary at the hands of wicked sinners. God does all of this for His ultimate glory and for our ultimate good.

Conclusion

We should see first from our text that God always carries out His purposes. Not only at the time of the exodus (Exodus 17:8-16), but several times afterward (Numbers 24:20-21; Deuteronomy 25:17-19), God instructs the Israelites that the Amalekites are to be exterminated because of their great sin, as evidenced in their attack on the Israelites after the exodus. God does not forget His Word, and in 1 Samuel 15, in spite of Saul's disobedience, God's Word is carried out. God keeps His promises, whether they are promises of blessing (as we see with the Israelites and the Kenites) or of judgment.

We see in the preservation of the Kenites and the destruction of the Amalekites not only the fulfillment of a very specific promise of God, but also the fulfilling of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). In this covenant with Abraham, He promises to bless those who bless Abraham and his descendants (e.g. the Kenites), and to curse those who curse Abraham and his seed (the Amalekites). The Abrahamic Covenant is a dominant factor in Israel's history, explaining God's judgment and blessing with respect to the nations which deal with the nation Israel.

I fear that Saul's cavalier attitude toward his own sin is similar to the way many view their sin today. For example, within Roman Catholicism some feel rather free to sin, and then to go to confession and say, "Father, forgive me for I have sinned. . . ." Many evangelical Protestant Christians take their sins too lightly as well. We glibly say that when Christ died for our sins, He died for all of them: past, present, and future. This, of course, is true. But this does not give us a license to sin. The grace of God must never be used as an excuse for our sin (see Romans 5:18—6:11; Jude 1:4). To presume upon God's grace and willfully sin, expecting to be forgiven, is perhaps the most terrifying sin of all (see Hebrews 10:26-31).

Our passage also warns us about the danger of stratifying sins. The heinous sins are those sins which others practice, while we tend to look upon our own sins, such as lying, as "little white lies." In evangelical churches, we who don't drink, smoke, or dance rail against those who do. It has been relatively easy for Christians to condemn homosexuals and those who are immoral, if this is not "our" kind of sin. Let us be warned that disobedience to God's Word is looked upon as the worst of sins. *To know what God commands us to do (or not to do), and then to disobey, is to willfully rebel against God.* No ritualistic worship, no ceremonial activity, overrides the evil of such sin.

Looking at Saul's sin in our text teaches us a valuable lesson about spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is not really about giving people what they want as much it is about doing what God wants. *Spiritual leaders must first be*

followers of God. Saul is appointed king over Israel. His task is to know God's commands and obey them and to lead the nation in obedience. To whatever degree Saul's words about the pressure applied by the people are true, Saul fails to lead in a godly manner. His task is not to please men but to please God. In our day and time, when leaders are often elected, their election is very often based upon how well they have pleased others. This is not the test of a spiritual leader. *The test is how well that person has pleased God by obeying His Word, and by challenging others to follow him as he obeys.* This is not said to justify autocratic leadership, which merely claims to speak for God. This is said of biblical leadership, which is based upon, and tested by, the Word of God.

Our text is even harder on us than we might think. Not only is disobedience to God's Word a most serious sin, partial obedience of His Word is a most serious sin. Saul teaches us that *partial obedience to God's commands is, in truth, really disobedience.* Like Saul, many of us are inclined to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, if we have almost completely obeyed God's commands. God does not view partial obedience the way we do. Serving God is not like horseshoes, where one gets points for coming close to the mark. *Sin is falling short of the mark, no matter how close you come to it.*

Repeatedly in the Bible total obedience is the standard, not partial obedience. Our Lord's parting words, which we know as the "Great Commission," include this statement:

28 "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:28, NASB, emphasis mine).

It is amazing how many of our Lord's commandments we have convinced ourselves are no longer applicable to us today. Is this just another form of partial obedience? We should seriously ponder this question.

Some Christians call striving to fully obey God's commandments *legalism*. Legalism is not holding to the high standard set by the Scripture. Legalism is finding the standard set by the Scriptures too low, and adding one's own requirements to those given us by God. Legalism goes beyond God's commands. Biblical Christianity should not seek to hold the standard short of God's commands.

We have never obeyed the commands of the Bible perfectly. The scribes and Pharisees foolishly thought they did, and they were wrong. Remember what our Lord said of their obedience:

20 “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

No one has ever perfectly obeyed God’s commandments. Even when it appears that we have, our attitude and motivation in doing so is never what it should be. My “righteousness” is often “self-righteousness” and my service, “self-serving.”

In truth, there is only one person whose obedience has ever been perfect, and we can thank God for Him, our Lord Jesus Christ.

18 “Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. 19 “And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:18-20, NASB).

8 I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy Law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8, NASB).

While God’s king is to obey God’s Word, no Old Testament king, including David, ever came close to the standard of perfect obedience. Only Jesus Christ, God’s Messiah, could claim perfect obedience to the will of God, and this obedience made possible the salvation of unworthy sinners like me and you:

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8, NASB).

4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU HAST NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY THOU HAST PREPARED FOR ME; 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN THOU HAST TAKEN NO PLEASURE. 7 “THEN I SAID, ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE ROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.’” 8 After saying above, “SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT

OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN THOU HAST NOT DESIRED, NOR HAST THOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*” (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO THY WILL.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second (Hebrews 10:4-9).

Paul summed the whole matter up in these words:

19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19).

It was Adam's sin, his disobedience, that plunged the whole human race into trouble. It was the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ which made our salvation possible. We must forsake all thought of earning our salvation, and realize that our works of righteousness are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). We must cling to the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross of Calvary, bearing the punishment for our sins, and who rose from the grave, declaring us to be righteous and giving us victory over sin and death. Here is our hope, and here is our salvation.



Samuel called Jesse and his sons to a sacrificial feast, examined each prospect, and finally chose David and anointed him.

Scientific note

Saul's evil spirit. Modern psychiatry has suggested that Saul may have suffered from a severe mental illness such as schizophrenia, thus accounting for his erratic behaviour. This would in no way lessen the responsibility, since the illness came as a result of God's judgment on Saul's unbelief.



Ancient biblical lyre or kinnor – mahokany model

1 Samuel 16:1-23

16. David anointed king

Verses 1-13. David's anointing

Verses 14-23. Saul's decline

Samuel's Orders

(16:1-3)

1 Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons." 2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? When Saul hears *of it*, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" 3 "And you shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you."

Samuel must be commended for his loyalty to Saul. When Saul disobeys God in chapter 15, Samuel is distressed and cries out to God all night long (15:11). His distress is in response to God regretting that He made Saul king. Samuel appears to intercede on Saul's behalf before God. Saul's response to Samuel's rebuke is hardly one of repentance, which causes Samuel further grief:

35 And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel (1 Samuel 15:35, NASB).

It is as though Samuel is unwilling to give up on Saul. He must be reluctant to appoint Saul's successor because this will appear to drive the final nail in Saul's political coffin. God's question to Samuel has the sound of a mild rebuke. How long will Samuel grieve over the one whom God has rejected? How long will Samuel have a different opinion than God? God has rejected Saul, and it is time for Samuel to act accordingly. Samuel is to fill his horn with oil and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite, where he is to anoint one of his sons as Saul's replacement.

Samuel's reluctance takes another form in verse 2, where Samuel hesitates due to the dangers involved. Samuel protests that if word reaches Saul that he is anointing a new king, Saul will kill him. This seems to be a real danger. After all, Saul does not hesitate to annihilate nearly all the Amalekites (chapter 15). He does not even hesitate to put his own son to death (chapter 14). Like Herod centuries later, he does not flinch at the thought of killing off any potential threat to his throne. Neither will he be reluctant to kill off any who support a rival king (see chapters 21 and 22). Samuel feels his concern is good reason for hesitation.

God has a solution to Samuel's problem. Samuel is to take a heifer with him and tell the people of Bethlehem that he has come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. He is to invite Jesse to this sacrificial meal, which will provide the occasion for him to anoint one of his sons as king. The specific son is not identified, but it is to be one of the sons of Jesse. This will be a sacrificial meal very much like the one Samuel is invited to attend, along with his servant (see chapters 9 and 10).

Some may be troubled at the instructions God gives Samuel. Does God not personally direct Samuel to deceive Saul and the people of Bethlehem? It certainly is true that God does not inform the elders of Bethlehem *all* that He is about to do through Samuel, but what He does indicate is absolutely true. Samuel does come to offer a sacrifice. God often has more in mind than He reveals to us beforehand. This is hardly inappropriate. The wonder is that God tells us any of what He is about to do (see John 15:15).

Samuel's Arrival, the Sacrificial Meal, and the Selection of David

(16:4-13)

4 So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, "Do you come in peace?" 5 And he said, "In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He also consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice. 6 Then it came about when they entered, that he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God *sees* not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." 9 Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." 10 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." 11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." 12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

The elders of the city of Bethlehem are white-faced when Samuel arrives. They fear that his arrival will not be peaceable. But Samuel's words put their minds at rest. He has come to offer a sacrifice, and they are invited to attend. They are to consecrate themselves and join Samuel in the sacrifice. In addition, Samuel consecrates Jesse and his sons as invited guests.^s

The selection of Saul, years earlier, was not difficult for Samuel. God told him in advance that the king-to-be would be coming the following day. God made it clear at the outset that Saul was the one He had chosen (9:15-17). In the case of Saul's replacement, Samuel knows where and whose son the new king will be, but he does not know which one of the sons of Jesse. Samuel has his own criteria for selecting the new king, some of which must stem from the designation of Saul, reinforced by the criteria for kings of that day and our own day as well.

Just what would the criteria be? First, one would expect the first-born to be the choice for king. The first-born was given a double portion of his father's goods. Headship of the family was passed on to the first born. The oldest would be expected to be the most mature, the most experienced, the wisest of the family. So why would anyone expect the youngest son to be God's choice? In addition to priority in birth order, Samuel expects the king-to-be will be evident by his appearance. Studies show that most top executives tend to be "tall, dark, and handsome." Samuel expects the same. This was exactly the way it was with Saul (see 9:2).

Jesse and his seven sons know what Samuel has come to do. It is something like finding Cinderella. Jesse and his sons must be awe-struck at the possibility of one of their family being the next king. And so Jesse has his sons pass by Samuel one by one, beginning with the oldest. God knows what Samuel is thinking when he looks at Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, a tall, good-looking fellow (see verse 7). But He tells Samuel that this is not His choice for Israel's next king, indicating His criteria has more to do with a man's character than with outward appearances. So Jesse has the next son, Abinadab, pass by Samuel, and he too is rejected. Then comes Shammah, and then the next four of Jesse's sons pass by Samuel, but God does not indicate any of them as His choice for king.

Surely Samuel is perplexed and wonders what the problem might be. It seems as though none of Jesse's family considers David even a remote possibility for king. He virtually slips from their minds, until Samuel asks Jesse if there are no other sons. Well, there is David, of course, but he is a mere lad -- he is still considered a child -- not a man. How could he be the new king? He has been given a child's work -- keeping the sheep. As I have traveled overseas, I have seen many a woman or child tending a small flock of sheep. This is David's job,

which seems to tell all. How can he even be considered as a candidate for Israel's king?

What matters to God is David's heart. Saul is a man whose heart God had to change:

9 Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day (1 Samuel 10:9, NASB).

But Saul's heart did not remain true to the Lord, and he has to be set aside and replaced by a man, like David, who has a heart for God. Thus, God says to Saul,

14 "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you" (1 Samuel 13:14, NASB).

What no one realizes is that God will provide David with all he needs to be Israel's king. David is immediately given the Spirit of God to guide and empower him. In the providence of God, he is strategically placed in the presence of Saul as his armour-bearer (16:21), where he can learn how a king rules. David is not chosen to immediately replace Saul, but is first placed in a kind of internship, later to be mentally, morally, and spiritually groomed for the kingdom which will not be his for several years.⁵⁹

Jesse sends for David, and he is brought before Samuel. David is also a good-looking young man, lacking none of the qualities found in his older brother save his age and position as first-born. We see that God does not disqualify David for his good looks, but neither does He choose him because of them. Good looks in a king is much like good looks in a wife – they should not be the basis for selecting a life's mate. But having chosen a woman of godly character, if she is also beautiful, this in no way diminishes her desirability (see Proverbs 31:30). David's character is pleasing to God, and it is the basis of his election to service. David's physical appearance is icing on the cake; David's deficiencies will be provided by the Holy Spirit and the preparation God has planned for him.

God indicates to Samuel that David is indeed His choice for Israel's king, and so Samuel stands up and anoints him. God's Spirit comes upon David, possessing and empowering him from this point onward.⁶⁰ Samuel then gets up and returns to his home in Ramah.

The Selection of David for Serving Saul

(16:14-23)

14 Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. 15 Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. 16 "Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play *the harp* with his hand, and you will be well." 17 So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me now a man who can play well, and bring *him* to me." 18 Then one of the young men answered and said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him." 19 So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the flock." 20 And Jesse took a donkey *loaded with* bread and a jug of wine and a young goat, and sent *them* to Saul by David his son. 21 Then David came to Saul and attended him, and Saul loved him greatly; and he became his armor bearer. 22 And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David now stand before me; for he has found favor in my sight." 23 So it came about whenever the *evil* spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play *it* with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

In terms of time, it is a long way from the prophetic designation of David as Israel's king to his ascent to the throne, and even longer in terms of logistics. How does a young man whom even his family does not consider a candidate for king rise to that position when a paranoid king is already in place, a king who does not hesitate to kill his competition? The answer to this question takes time and space in Scripture, but verses 14-23 give us a sample of how God providentially brings about what He indicates through His prophet.

Very obviously, Saul has no idea of what has taken place as recorded in verses 1-13 of this chapter. If he believes Samuel's words (as well he may not, especially as time passes and he remains on as Israel's king), he will indeed be set aside and replaced by a man of God's choosing. He does not know Samuel has designated and anointed David as his replacement, or that the Spirit which God had given him has now been given to David. What he does know is that things are very different than they were. He never sees Samuel (see 15:35). He does not sense the Lord's presence and power, through the Spirit. He does experience a very different spiritual phenomenon though. An "**evil spirit from God**" now comes upon Saul, terrorizing him. He seems to have spells where the terrorizing of this spirit is present and times that are more normal.

As one might expect, there are different theories about this **“evil spirit from God.”** The appearance of this **“spirit,”** like the disappearance of the Holy Spirit, is from the Lord. That is, it is the Lord who directs the Holy Spirit to forsake Saul. Is it possible that David’s plea that God not let His Spirit depart from him (Psalm 51:11) is, in some measure, the result of what David beholds with his own eyes while in Saul’s service? The evil spirit is also from the Lord. This should not be surprising, because God is sovereign. Satan cannot do anything to anyone without God’s permission (see, for example, Job 1 and 2). To Saul’s servants, this **“evil spirit”** is not new or unusual. They have seen this before, and they recognize it in his life and know what the best treatment for his condition is. All of this inclines me to conclude that this is a demonic spirit which now oppresses Saul. From what I know about history, it seems that men like Adolph Hitler experienced something remarkably similar.

Saul’s servants believe that soothing music will have a beneficial effect on Saul, and they recommend that Saul find a man skilled at playing the harp so that when the spirit overtakes him, the musician can play soothing music and calm his troubled spirit. Saul approves of this idea. He, above all, is terrified by the spirit’s oppression in his life.

One of Saul’s servants suddenly thinks of a man who perfectly fits Saul’s need. He has somewhere seen and heard about David in Bethlehem. David is not only a gifted musician who skillfully plays the harp, he is also a valiant warrior (as seen, perhaps in his “battles” with the bear and the lion), a man of good looks and godly wisdom. Most importantly, he is a man with whom the Lord is present. The very things which qualify David to serve as king are the things which qualify him to serve the king. Already David’s kingly qualities are becoming evident, even to those in the palace.

Saul summons David in a polite way, but it is also an offer no one dares to refuse the king. The request is made of Jesse, since David still lives under his roof. From Saul’s words spoken to Jesse, it is evident that Saul is aware of David’s role as the sheep-tender too (see verse 19). Jesse sends David, along with gifts of food, to the king where David begins to serve as the king’s attendant. As David’s character and skills become more evident to Saul, he is promoted to the position of Saul’s armor bearer, probably the most intimate and personal job of any of Saul’s staff. Saul not only comes to respect David’s abilities, he comes to love him as well. He is perhaps almost like a son to Saul.

David’s probationary service ends, and he is given tenure, so to speak, with the king. Saul properly requests of Jesse that David be allowed to enter into permanent service with him. So it is that whenever Saul is oppressed by the evil spirit, David plays his harp and soothes the troubled spirit of the king. The Spirit

of God in David brings about the departure, for a time, of the evil spirit. How does Saul spell relief? D A V I D.

Conclusion

Saul's sin in chapter 15 is the end for Saul; it is not the end of Saul's reign, but the end of Saul's opportunity to turn and repent. But why anoint David as king so long before he is appointed and crowned as king? *First*, the Spirit, which comes upon Saul for his kingly service, can now be removed and placed upon David. It is in the Spirit that David will now grow and mature and minister to Saul, as God prepares him for service. How ironic, how unexpected, that David will serve the king to prepare him to serve as king. God's ways are beyond our ability to predict.

Secondly, the anointing of David results in a test for all Israelites. David's anointing, unlike Saul's, is semi-public. His father and brothers, as well as the prominent men of the city who attend the sacrificial feast have to know that the new king who will replace Saul is being designated. As men realize that David is the next king, their response to him is indicative of their relation to the King of Israel and His kingdom. It also determines their place in David's kingdom.

Let me illustrate with a man and his wife, Nabal and Abigail, described in 1 Samuel 25. David is fleeing from Saul, and he and his men are hiding out where Nabal's flocks are kept. They have not molested any of Nabal's shepherds or taken any of his flock. They have been an asset to Nabal, and now at sheering time, they politely ask Nabal for a gift. Nabal refuses, with these words:

10b "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. 11 "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know? (1 Samuel 25:10b-11).

It is not that Nabal is unaware of who David is. He knows he is the son of Jesse, and he also knows that he is fleeing from his master, Saul. In other words, he knows that David is the designated king to replace Saul. If there is any doubt of this, listen to the words of his wife, Abigail, spoken to David:

28 "Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you all your days. 29 "And should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. 30 "And it shall come about when the LORD

shall do for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and shall appoint you ruler over Israel, 31 that this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the LORD shall deal well with my lord, then remember your maidservant” (1 Samuel 25:28-31).

Nabal knows exactly who David is, and he refuses to have anything to do with him. Is this because he might have negative repercussions from Saul (see chapters 21 and 22)? Abigail is a wise and godly woman. She knows who David is, and her response and appeal to David are based upon her submission to him as her coming king. David’s early designation as Israel’s future king thus becomes a test.

It is much the same today. When the author of 1 Samuel turns his attention from Saul to David, he calls us to consider a man who is a prototype of our Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, Saul is remarkably like Satan. Saul is given authority to rule under God, but instead, his rules and rule become more important to him than God’s rules and rule. And so he is set aside. David is the one designated to take his place, to rule righteously over the people of God. Satan, like Saul of old, has been rejected by God. On the cross of Calvary, our Lord defeated Satan. But he still is free to oppose God, though his future containment and punishment is sure. In this interim period, Jesus Christ has been designated as God’s King. He has not only proclaimed the kingdom of God, He has procured it by His death, burial, and resurrection. *All those who submit to Him as King will enter into His kingdom, and rule with him for all eternity. The question for you and I today is: “Whom will we serve?”* Who will reign over us? To whose kingdom will we submit? By nature, all men are born into Satan’s kingdom. *It is only by the new birth, by trusting in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, that men are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God.* Have you changed kings, my friend?

Samuel is wrong about who God’s king will be. He expects that God’s king will be “tall, dark, and handsome,” so to speak. God makes it clear to Samuel that outward appearance is not the criteria for God’s choice of king (1 Samuel 16:7). David is good looking as it turns out, but this is not the basis for his election by God. By divine design, our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s eternal King, was not to be recognized by His appearance either:

1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *statel*y form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and

forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him (Isaiah 53:1-3, NASB).

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8, NASB).

The Lord Jesus was not, as I understand these texts and others, a striking person, physically speaking. Men were not drawn to Him by His handsome features or by His deep, broadcast-quality voice. Men were drawn to Him as they recognized His heart for God, His being God. It was His submission and obedience to the Father which set Him apart, along with the fact that He perfectly fulfilled the prophecies concerning Messiah. He is the One God has appointed to rule, and when He returns, all men will bow the knee to Him and acknowledge Him as God's King (see Philippians 2:9-11). *The exhortation of Scripture is for us to receive Him as King and to become a part of His kingdom, or to await His wrath on us as His enemy* (see Psalm 2:10-12).

This may be an appropriate place to say a word about music and its relationship to the spiritual realm. You will recall from 1 Samuel 10 (verses 5-6, 10-13) that the prophets whom Saul met, and whom Saul joined as **“one of the prophets”** (at least momentarily) as the Spirit came mightily upon him, were accompanied musically by stringed instruments -- the tambourine, flute and harp (verse 5). Somehow the Spirit's coming upon Saul (and the rest, perhaps) is associated with or even initiated by music. In chapter 16, Saul's demonic fits are calmed by David's playing of the harp. Once again in 2 Kings 2:14-15, Elisha calls for a minstrel so that he can prophesy in the Spirit. I take it that music plays some kind of role in connecting with (or disconnecting from) the spiritual realm. I take it that we should be very careful about the kind of music to which we submit ourselves. I know there has been a lot of talk about “rock music,” and I am not inclined to wax eloquent on this matter here, but I do suggest that there is a potentially beneficial type of music, and very likely, a kind of music that may invoke the wrong spirit. This text should give us pause for thought on the subject of the music to which we listen and its influence upon us.

Our passage is about God's selection of David for service -- not for his salvation. Someone may be inclined to come away from this message thinking that God chose to *save* David because he had a heart for God. God chose David to *serve* because of his heart. There is a vast difference between God's selection

to *service* and His election to *salvation*. If God were to choose to save those who had a pure heart, He would save no one:

9 Who can say, “I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin”? (Proverbs 20:9, NASB; see Romans 3:9-18).

9 “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, NASB; see also Romans 3:9-18).

God does not save some men because He looks into their hearts and likes what He sees. God saves men who are wicked sinners in their hearts, and He has mercy upon them, placing their sins on His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ alone is sinless and thus able to die for the sins of others. *There is only one person in all of human history whose heart was free from sin, and that person is Jesus Christ. God saves those who trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins and for the gift of eternal life.*

There is a great deal of talk about leadership these days, and I must say that the qualities and qualifications sought in contemporary leaders are not those which God sought in David. Evangelicals choose their leaders on nearly the same basis as secular society does. We look for men who have “resources” (money and influence) and “a good business head.” God sought a man who had a heart for Him. I believe that character is the first and foremost prerequisite for leadership. It may not be the only one, but it is foundational. Let us look for the kind of leadership that God chooses. Let us seek to be the kind of men and women whom God seeks for His service.

1 Samuel 17:1-58

17. David and Goliath

Verses 1-11. Defiance of Goliath

Verses 12-30. David appears on the scene

Verses 31-54 David’s victory

Verses 55-58. Saul’s question

The Setting

(17:1-3)

1 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. 2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and camped in

the valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines. 3 And the Philistines stood on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them.

Saul never seems to take the initiative in precipitating a military confrontation with the Philistines, and this is no exception. After their partial defeat and humiliation at the hand of the Israelites in chapter 14, the Philistines seem eager to not only regain the military dominance they once held over Israel (see 4:9), but their sense of pride as well. The two armies square off approximately 15 miles southwest of Jerusalem,⁸ digging in on opposite sides of the Elah valley and setting up camp on the sides of two mountains, each of which slopes down to the valley with a brook running between (see 17:40).

We may very well wonder why this standoff continues for so long, with both sides feigning a fight with loud shouting and all of the hype of war, but with no real contact and no casualties. Saul and his army do not really want to fight, and neither do the Philistines. It is easier to understand the Philistines' reluctance. They employ steel as well as bronze in their implements of war. They have chariots, for example (see 13:5), but these are designed for relatively level ground, not mountain slopes -- these are not "all terrain vehicles." Neither is it easy for a heavily protected soldier like Goliath to fight with agility and ease while struggling to keep his footing on a mountain slope. The danger of fighting in such rough terrain is clearly stated later on in 2 Samuel. When the forces loyal to David go out to fight Absalom and his army, more of the rebel forces are killed by the terrain than by David's soldiers:

8 For the battle there was spread over the whole countryside, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured (2 Samuel 18:8, NASB).

Even if the Philistines outnumber and outclass the Israelites in their weapons, the terrain is such that it greatly hinders the Philistines' cause, somewhat like the way winter may have hindered military efforts in Europe in the past. Neither side seems to want a full-scale battle, and so Goliath's challenge is somewhat tempting, if he can only find someone willing to fight with him.

The Villain and the Victor

(17:4-16)

4 Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 And *he had* a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 *He also had* bronze greaves on

his legs and a bronze javelin *slung* between his shoulders. 7 And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear *weighed* six hundred shekels of iron; his shield-carrier also walked before him. 8 And he stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, and said to them, “ Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. 9 “If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us.” 10 Again the Philistine said, “I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together.” 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. 12 Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons. And Jesse was old in the days of Saul, advanced *in years* among men. 13 And the three older sons of Jesse had gone after Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the first-born, and the second to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. 14 And David was the youngest. Now the three oldest followed Saul, 15 but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's flock at Bethlehem. 16 And the Philistine came forward morning and evening for forty days, and took his stand.

It is possible that Goliath is the commander of the Philistine forces, but I see no compelling reason to think so. He is not mentioned in the first three verses of chapter 17 and only seems to emerge after a lengthy standoff between the two armies. When he is introduced, it is not as the Philistines' king nor their commander-in-chief, but rather as a “**champion**.”^a I am therefore inclined to think that as the standoff continues, Goliath takes this opportunity to approach the Israelites, going beyond his own forces and standing out in the open as an inviting target for any bold enough to “come and get” him.

Goliath seems to speak for the entire Philistine army when he proposes a solution to the stalemate between the two armies. It is one which will give him great pleasure (he seems to love a good fight, and the fact that he is alive bears witness that he has not lost a fight yet), and the Philistines a real advantage, if Goliath prevails. But, as the offer stands, if but one Israelite opposes Goliath and wins, Israel's victory over the entire Philistine army will be conceded. In this way, only one life would need to be lost to determine the victorious army.

Over a period of forty days, the Israelites seem to become increasingly fearful and reluctant to oblige Goliath. All the while, Goliath seems to become more and more bold. Twice a day (morning and evening) Goliath approaches the Israelite front lines and challenges any Israelite warrior with the courage to

come out and fight him. I can imagine that as the days wear on, Goliath becomes more arrogant, perhaps approaching even closer and closer to them (with the Israelites fleeing when he does so – see 17:24). His offer is first a challenge and then it seems to become a taunt. He is trying to goad the Israelites into action.

This is an easy challenge for Goliath to make. After all, this fellow is a giant. He is “**six cubits and a span**” tall (verse 4), which makes him almost ten feet tall!^a If he were a basketball player today, he could “slam-dunk” the ball standing flat-footed! If his height is not enough to terrorize the Israelites, his armour would send a chill up their spine. I have heard of women “dressed to kill,” but Goliath really does send a message just by the way he is outfitted. He wears a bronze helmet and a coat of armour weighing about 125 pounds, and his legs are also protected by armour. He carries a bronze javelin between his shoulder blades and has a spear heavy enough that some of us might need a friend to take up one end just to help carry it. The head of the spear weighs about 15 pounds by some estimates, and others suggest even more. Besides all the protective equipment Goliath wears or carries, he has an armour bearer who goes ahead of him to hold up a shield.

The Israelites do not take Goliath’s challenge lightly. Along with their king, they are terrified by this Philistine giant. They are all so frightened that no one is willing to accept Goliath’s challenge. No one wants to take on this giant. Morning and evening for forty days^a Goliath tries to provoke someone to fight him, and he terrorizes those who do not.

Goliath, the Philistine champion, is described in verses 4-11 in terms of his towering physical stature and his impressive defensive and offensive armor. David, Goliath’s opponent-to-be, is introduced in verses 12-15 by a very different description. Nothing is said here about David’s stature, his strength, or his weapons. We are simply told that he is the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, the Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah. We are further told that Jesse is a very old man during the years that Saul reigns (verse 12). We are told that David’s three oldest brothers (the same three named in 16:6-9) have gone to war with Saul, and that David is left at home to care for the sheep, except for those times he needs to commute to serve as a minister of music for Saul (see 16:14-23).

Why this “family” emphasis in describing David when Goliath is described in terms of his awesome looks, weapons, and aggressiveness? There are several reasons. *First*, it is not David’s appearance which causes God to choose him, but his heart, his character. *Second*, in order for David to be recognized as the one whose offspring will someday be the Messiah, he must be of the tribe of Judah (see Genesis 49:8-12), and he must be a Bethlehemite (see Micah 5:2). His being the youngest in the family explains why he is assigned to care for the

sheep, and also why his aged father sends him to deliver food to his brothers and bring back a report about their welfare. It is also another example of how God often reverses man's ways, which here would be to choose the oldest son of Jesse, not the youngest.⁶⁵

David Visits His Brothers in Battle

(17:17-25)

17 Then Jesse said to David his son, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to your brothers. 18 "Bring also these ten cuts of cheese to the commander of *their* thousand, and look into the welfare of your brothers, and bring back news of them. 19 "For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines." 20 So David arose early in the morning and left the flock with a keeper and took *the supplies* and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the circle of the camp while the army was going out in battle array shouting the war cry. 21 And Israel and the Philistines drew up in battle array, army against army. 22 Then David left his baggage in the care of the baggage keeper, and ran to the battle line and entered in order to greet his brothers. 23 As he was talking with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine from Gath named Goliath, was coming up from the army of the Philistines, and he spoke these same words; and David heard *them*. 24 When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid. 25 And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up? Surely he is coming up to defy Israel. And it will be that the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."

In verses 4-30, there is a very clear contrast between the way Goliath comes to do battle with David and the way David finds himself facing Goliath. Goliath's prominent role is predictable, even expected. He is a seasoned soldier, an arrogant (if not courageous) fighter, a champion whose role is to fight in that territory between the two opposing armies. David comes into this fight in a very different way. We would never expect it, and probably David would not either. He is not even in the army. His three oldest brothers are, but then there are four other brothers older than David who are not fighting either. David is the youngest of the eight sons. His job is to play the harp for Saul and to care for his father's sheep. Who could ever imagine that he would end up accepting Goliath's challenge?

David's arrival at the scene of conflict is not the result of his own initiative. He is more than busy caring for Saul and his father's sheep (verse 15). David's

three oldest brothers are fighting the Philistines a few miles to the west, and apparently it has been some time since Jesse has received any report about the welfare of these three men. Due to his advanced age, Jesse cannot travel the distance, so he summons David and instructs him to go to the camp of the Israelite army. Ostensibly, his purpose for visiting is to take some supplies to his brothers and their commander (verses 17-18). One has the feeling, however, that what Jesse wants most is a first-hand report on how things are going and to hear word from his sons.

I am sure that Jesse does not want to put his youngest son in harm's way. I believe he expects David to arrive while the soldiers are in camp, not on the battle line. He wants David to deliver the supplies, speak directly with his brothers, and then hurry home with the news without getting involved in the fighting. It simply does not work out that way. God providentially orchestrates events so that a very different series of events transpire.

After seeing that someone will look after his flock of sheep, David leaves early in the morning, travelling westward approximately 12 miles to the Israelite camp. Had he arrived just a few minutes earlier, things might have been very different. He would have found his brothers still at their camp, where he could have simply handed them the supplies Jesse sent, asked about their well-being, and then set out for home before his three brothers go to the battle line.

But David arrives just as the Israelite soldiers are leaving their camp and rushing toward the battle line, giving an impressive battle cry in unison as they charge -- approaching, but not getting too close, to the Philistines. David has little choice but to leave the food from home with one who stays back with the supplies and to follow his brothers to the front line. There, David finds his brothers, and as he talks with them, Goliath steps forward to repeat his challenge for the 41st time. Goliath says what he always does, but this is the first time David has heard him. David listens to this giant's challenge and his cursing of Israel and her God. He watches the frightened Israelites (including his brothers) draw back, their courage shattered by this man's words and appearance.

Providentially, some of the Israelite soldiers speak to David, or at least to each other in his hearing. The words David hears catch him completely off guard, so much so that he asks that the matter be repeated and confirmed several times by different people. They all agree that king Saul has issued a call for a volunteer to fight Goliath and has further offered a substantial reward to the man who steps forward and accepts the challenge. Saul promises to give this person a substantial amount of wealth, as well as one of his daughters for a wife. He also promises to exempt the volunteer's father's family from taxes.

I think this is what Saul does. Saul, who is unwilling to personally take on Goliath, calls for a volunteer to do so. No one volunteers. Then he offers a substantial amount of cash (or land, or whatever form the wealth might take) to any volunteer. Still no one volunteers. A few days later, Saul throws in the offer of one of his daughters for a wife -- still there are no volunteers. Finally, Saul adds a further benefit to the package – he will exempt this man’s family from taxation. Now here is a deal Saul thinks no one can refuse.

David thinks no one can refuse it either. When he hears what Saul has offered, it is so incredible he asks several people to confirm what he has heard before he believes it. In my mind, David is not entirely motivated by the gifts. He is amazed instead that such an offer has been made at all, because he fully expects any true soldier of Saul to jump at the chance – the privilege – of taking on Goliath. After all, this man is cursing the people of God, and thus God Himself. David is certain that God will give the one who fights Goliath the victory. It is a cinch! And on top of the great honour and privilege of fighting Goliath, the king is offering all these gifts! It is too much to comprehend. David asks over and over to be sure he has heard correctly. Is there some catch? Why is no one accepting Saul’s offer to fight?

David’s Exchange with Eliab

(17:28-30)

28 Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger burned against David and he said, “Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle.” 29 But David said, “What have I done now? Was it not just a question?” 30 Then he turned away from him to another and said the same thing; and the people answered the same thing as before.

Most think the miracle of this chapter is David’s defeat of Goliath. While this is a great miracle, let us not forget that many obstacles must be dealt with before David can even confront Goliath. The first is David’s circumstances. He is young and not even in Saul’s army. He is a shepherd boy, tending his father’s flock a number of miles away from the place where the two armies are facing off with each other. Besides Goliath, David must also get past his older brother, Eliab, and Saul. He must first obtain official permission to engage Goliath on the battlefield. The first obstacle is in the process of being removed. David is now dealing with the second obstacle – his oldest brother, Eliab – in verses 28-30.

Let us remember Eliab's words to David here in the light of what we have already learned about him in chapter 16. Eliab is the oldest of Jesse's eight sons; David is the youngest. Eliab must be "tall, dark, and handsome," because Samuel expects that he will be the one he will anoint as king of Israel. Eliab is rejected (along with David's six other older brothers) because God will not choose the king on the basis of outward appearance, but on the basis of having a heart after His own heart (13:14; 16:7). Eliab does not have the "heart" David does. Furthermore, Samuel anointed David before his brothers (16:13), so that Eliab knows about God's selection of David as king.

By the end of chapter 17, Eliab does not come out looking very good. When he hears David inquiring of some of his fellow-soldiers about the rewards Saul has offered the man who defeats Goliath, Eliab is greatly angered and proceeds to vent that anger toward David. He first accuses David of coming to the battlefield for all the wrong reasons. Specifically, he accuses David of wanting to be a spectator at the battlefield for his own entertainment, not unlike going to a circus. Eliab either does not know that David has come in obedience to his father's instructions, or he mentally sets this aside. He then attacks David by accusing him of forsaking his responsibilities with respect to his job of caring for his father's sheep. He indicts David for abandoning the flock and adds insult to injury by adding the word "**few**" ("**few sheep**," verse 28), suggesting that David's task is not only menial (taking care of the sheep), but trivial (just a "**few sheep**"). In fact, David has not neglected his flock, but secured someone to care for them in his absence (verse 20). Worst of all, Eliab dares to judge his youngest brother's heart, accusing him of acting out of a wicked heart.

Ironically, in every area Eliab accuses David, his youngest brother is not only innocent but commendable. David comes to the battlefield to bring food to his brothers and take back news to their father -- he comes to the battlefield in obedience to his father's instructions. David does not forsake his sheep; he secures someone to care for them while he is absent. David is not guilty of having a wicked heart; he is chosen by God because he is "**a man after God's own heart.**" And David is not to be treated with disrespect as he will soon be Israel's king (and this includes Eliab).

Running through all of Eliab's accusations is one main theme: David's youth. David is accused of coming to the battle scene out of childish curiosity. That is wrong. He is accused of forsaking his responsibilities as a child is inclined to do and also accused of insolence and wickedness of heart of which children are capable. How dare David come and raise questions pertaining to Saul's request and Goliath's challenge!

If David had gone home right then and given his father a complete and honest report about the war and the conduct of his older brothers, what would he have told Jesse? He would have to report that absolutely no progress had been made in defeating the Philistines, that Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah all ran like cowards when Goliath approached. He would have to tell his father that when he brought up the subject of volunteering to fight Goliath, he was severely “cut down” by his oldest brother. Is it not interesting that Goliath’s arrogance and blasphemies are minimized by Eliab, while David is falsely accused of wickedness for doing and speaking what is right?

David may be disappointed and distressed by his oldest brother’s unkind words of condemnation, but he is not stopped by them. He answers back to his brother and challenges Eliab to be specific as to the wrong he has done by speaking as he has. He seems to insist that the matter about which he is speaking is not inappropriate. What else should one be talking about than taking on Goliath and seeking the reward Saul offers? So David continues what he has been doing – asking those around him if his understanding of Saul’s offer is correct.

David and Goliath’s Goliath (Saul)

(17:31-39)

31 When the words which David spoke were heard, they told *them* to Saul, and he sent for him. 32 And David said to Saul, “Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” 33 Then Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are *but* a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth.” 34 But David said to Saul, “Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued *it* from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized *him* by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 “Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.” 37 And David said, “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and may the LORD be with you.” 38 Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armour. 39 And David girded his sword over his armour and tried to walk, for he had not tested *them*. So David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these, for I have not tested *them*.” And David took them off.

If Eliab has his way, David will be sent away in shame. Fortunately for Israel, David is neither devastated nor deterred by Eliab’s sarcastic rebuke by which he

attempts to “cut David down to size.” Eliab may have ordered David to go home, if Saul had not gotten word about David’s interest in his incentive program for taking on Goliath. Regardless, Saul summons David, whose first words to his king are gracious and encouraging:

32 “Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine”.

While the application of David’s words goes beyond Saul, it certainly focuses upon Saul who is terrified by the foreboding presence of Goliath and the Philistines. David graciously and somewhat indirectly encourages Saul not to fear. The reason David can say this is because he is willing to go and fight Goliath. David is willing to do what neither Saul nor any other soldier in Israel is willing to do – fight Goliath.

Before considering David’s faith, let us ponder Saul’s fears for a moment. I have to conclude that by nature Saul is less than courageous. His father was a **“mighty man of valour”** (9:1), but this is never said of Saul.⁶ Saul is the one who hides in the baggage when he is indicated to be Israel’s king (10:22). When the Spirit comes upon Saul, he becomes a new man, with a new heart (10:9). David seems to be a man after God’s own heart before the Spirit comes upon him. When faced with Philistine opposition, Saul is passive, not aggressive, though fighting the Philistines is a significant part of his calling as king (9:16). Only when the Spirit comes upon Saul mightily does he seem to act decisively against his enemies (11:6). By nature, Saul is less than courageous; only in the Spirit is he a true leader.

Having said all of this, I must admit feeling some compassion (or at least pity) for Saul. In many ways, his refusal to fight Goliath (individually or collectively) is completely logical. After all, Saul has been told that his kingdom is as good as finished (13:13-14; 15:23). Samuel leaves him, never to see his face again (15:35). And the Spirit of God has departed from him, replaced by an **“evil Spirit from the Lord”** (16:14). I don’t think I would be doing anything dangerous or courageous either.

David is a man of courage and, at this point, the only Israelite on the battlefield with courage. Where does he get this courage? Let me suggest several sources. *First*, David’s courage grows out of his theology – his understanding of God. David is **“a man after God’s own heart”** (13:14; 16:7). *A person cannot be a “man after God’s own heart” unless he knows the heart of God, and this comes through an understanding of God through His Word* (see, for example, Psalm 119). David knows God, not only historically (the way God delivered Israel in the past), and theologically, but experientially, as he will soon indicate to Saul.

David acts like the king of Israel should act. He needs to trust in God, to inspire his fellow-Israelites to do likewise, and to defeat the enemies of God, especially the Philistines. When David was anointed as the coming king over Israel (chapter 16), he must have spent a good deal of time pondering just what all this meant, much like Mary would do centuries later (see Luke 2:19, 51). What does it mean to be Israel's king? What should David do as the king? No doubt his actions the day he faces Goliath are the result of his meditations. This young man is not a soldier, and some would say he is too young to fight, but David is providentially placed in a circumstance *where he must trust God and obey His Word or cower in unbelief and disobedience*, as Saul and the rest.

Saul gives David every opportunity to excuse himself and go back home to his father and his sheep without guilt or shame. There is a certain kindness in Saul's words to David when he attempts to talk him out of fighting Goliath. Saul does not say that David is too small to fight Goliath, but that he is too young and therefore inexperienced. Goliath is a seasoned champion with years of combat experience behind him. David is but a youth, with no combat missions at all. At least this is what Saul supposes, but David proves otherwise so convincingly that Saul allows him to represent Israel in fighting Goliath.

David is young, but his seemingly trivial duty of caring for a small flock of sheep has very nicely prepared him to fight Goliath. Eliab was never more wrong than he was about David, as David's words to Saul show. David sees and hears what every other Israelite soldier does that morning on the front lines with his brothers. The difference is that David views this circumstance as amazingly similar to situations he has successfully faced as a shepherd boy. Is Goliath strong and mighty, able to destroy a man? So are lions and bears, and David has faced them down and killed them. Is Goliath an arrogant loud mouth? Few creatures are more intimidating by their roaring than a bear or a lion (see 1 Peter 5:8). In the carrying out of his duties as a shepherd, David has killed both lions and bears (verses 34-36).⁶⁷

As David risks his life to rescue the sheep under his care, God rescues him. Is David worried about facing Goliath? No, because the God who rescued him from the paw⁶⁸ of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue him from the hand of Goliath. Notice that David speaks of being rescued from the "hand" or "paw" of the lion and the bear, and not the "jaws." This is because the wild beast had a lamb in its mouth and refused to release it, so it had to fight David with its paws and claws. Goliath poses no new threat, and since David has, with the help of God, destroyed loud-mouthed lions and bears by his hand, he can also destroy loud-mouthed Philistines. Does Goliath speak (roar) in a way that frightens the Israelite forces? He does not frighten David. He has been here before.

I believe David's faith in God is contagious, and that Saul somehow believes there is a good chance David will prevail over Goliath. Saul gives David permission to fight Goliath and offers him his armor. The armor is a bad idea, which David rejects, but it does strongly imply that David is fighting Goliath in Saul's place as the official representative of the Israelite army. If this is the case, then David's victory should be Israel's victory (which it proves to be). On the flip side, David's defeat will appear to be Israel's defeat, at least by the terms Goliath lays down (see verses 8-9). David is not fighting this battle alone. He is fighting for God, for Saul, and for the entire nation of Israel.

I am not inclined to make a lot out of Saul's armour which he offers David. It might seem, at least from a distance (and to those not advised) that it is Saul going out against Goliath. After all, who else has armor like Saul's? It also suggests that David cannot be that small in size, or the armor would not even fit. David puts it on and then puts it off, because he has not learned to fight in such armor – in his words, he has not **“proven it.”** David will go against Goliath with the same weapons he has used before, with those God has given him the skill to use.

David and Goliath

(17:40-54)

40 And he took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in *his* pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine. 41 Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. 42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was *but* a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. 43 And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 The Philistine also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.” 45 Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. 46 “This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands. “ 48 Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49 And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a

stone and slung *it*, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground. 50 Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David's hand. 51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. 52 And the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted and pursued the Philistines as far as the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the slain Philistines lay along the way to Shaaraim, even to Gath and Ekron. 53 And the sons of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines and plundered their camps. 54 Then David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his weapons in his tent.

The irony of this incident is that David's armour (or lack of it) seems to "disarm" Goliath. Here is a man whose ego seems as large or larger than his frame. He is arrogant, proud, and blasphemous. He challenges the Israelites to send him their best warrior, and the winner takes all. Can you imagine the shock to Goliath and his ego when David comes forth? Here is a young man with no defensive armour at all, and seemingly no offensive armor. David does carry a sling, but he has not yet placed a rock in it, so he certainly does not appear threatening. What Goliath does see is the stick David carries in his hand. Goliath seems to jump to the conclusion that this is David's only weapon. People carry sticks – even today – to ward off dogs that might harass them. Is this why David brings his stick, to deal with Goliath like a dog? Goliath utters curses by his gods (verse 43). He is from Gath; has Goliath ever heard how God dealt with his "god" Dagon?

What an insult to Goliath to send a young lad with no armor and a stick! Is this how seriously they take him? Do they think so little of his ability to send him someone like this? Goliath is good and mad, and he certainly intends to kill David and feed his carcass to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field (verse 44). Is this threat also intended to intimidate David? It does not. If anything, it confirms David's faith. This imagery of feeding the dead body of the enemy to the birds and beasts does not originate with Goliath:

25 "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them, but you shall flee seven ways before them, and you shall be *an example of* terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26 "And your carcasses shall be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten *them* away" (Deuteronomy 28:25-26).

God used this expression to describe the fate of those Israelites who rejected His Word, but this imagery is also employed with regard to the enemies of God, whoever they may be (see Jeremiah 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20; Ezekiel 29:5). Does Goliath hope to frighten David by threatening to kill him and feed his body to the birds and the beasts? He simply reminds David of a promise God made regarding His enemies. It is for this reason that David can turn Goliath's curse inside out:

46 "This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Samuel 17:46).

It is not David's carcass that will become bird food that day, but Goliath's. David makes it very clear that his contest with Goliath is not merely a personal matter – David is fighting Goliath for the glory of God, and on behalf of the nation Israel. His victory should be a lesson to all that the **"battle is the Lord's,"** as well as the victory (verse 47).

This gets Goliath moving. David does not wait for Goliath to come to him. Instead, he runs toward Goliath, taking out one of the five stones as he runs, placing it in his sling, and then swinging it about as he heads toward the giant. Can you imagine David at this point trying to run with all Saul's armour, hoping to strike a lethal blow to Goliath when he cannot even reach above his shoulders with a sword? The sling is the perfect weapon. Goliath is stationed behind the shield held by his armour bearer. He is armour-plated from his feet to his head, with an opening only around his eyes so that he can see. This is the exposed part of his body. This is David's target, which he hits dead center, dare I say, while on the run. The stone sinks deeply into the skull of Goliath, bringing him down like a falling tree. David runs to Goliath, pulls out the sword from his motionless body, and hacks off his head with it. The enemy is now bird food.

This must have been one agonizing moment in time when the whole world seemed to stand still and keep silent. The Philistines are paralyzed for that one moment, minds racing to take in what has just happened before their eyes as they begin to realize its implications. The same must be true for the Israelite soldiers. And then, after this one moment of paralysis, the Philistines take off on the run. With the loss of their champion, all courage and will to fight are gone. The Israelite soldiers seize the moment and take out after the retreating enemy. There is no better place from which to fight such a foe than from behind, where there is no armour to protect and the sheer weight of their armor hinders their retreat. Armour, swords, anything which slows down the enemy's escape is cast

aside. Bodies of slain Philistines are strewn from the battle site to the very gates of their cities. And on their way back, the Israelite soldiers are laden with the booty they plunder from the Philistine camps. David seems only to be carrying the head of the Philistine, along with his weapons, which he temporarily places in his tent.⁶⁶

A Problematic Passage

(17:55-58)

55 Now when Saul saw David going out against the Philistine, he said to Abner the commander of the army, “Abner, whose son is this young man?” And Abner said, “By your life, O king, I do not know.” 56 And the king said, “You inquire whose son the youth is.” 57 So when David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the Philistine's head in his hand. 58 And Saul said to him, “Whose son are you, young man?” And David answered, “*I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.*”

This passage poses problems for biblical scholars. It may appear that Saul has never before met David, and thus he does not know who he is. We should begin by pointing out that Saul's question is not, “Who is this young man?” but “Who is this young man's father?” Why would we suppose that because Saul knows David he also knows his father? In chapter 16, messengers are sent to Jesse to request that David be allowed to come to Saul's home to play the harp for him (16:19). This does not require that Saul knows David's father's name. His servants can take care of this detail. We should also remember that Jesse is elderly and unable to travel, which is the reason David is sent to the battlefield to inquire about the welfare of his brothers (17:12, 17ff.). Thus, Jesse and Saul probably never did meet. Why is it unusual then for Saul to inquire about the name of David's father, perhaps for the tax roles, if he actually exempts him?

In chapter 16, we know David goes to work for Saul (16:14-23), and in chapter 17, we are reminded of this fact (17:15). In chapter 18, we find David playing his harp for the troubled Saul, as he does in chapter 16 (18:10-12) -- so too in chapter 19 (19:9-10). We can hardly avoid the fact that Saul knows David, though he does not know (or at least remember) the name of his father, Jesse. It is no wonder that a king does not remember the name of one of his part-time servant's father. Even if we expected Saul to remember, our text does not raise questions about the accuracy of the passage, only the accuracy of Saul's memory. As messed up as Saul is, why do we find this strange?

There is something in verses 55-58, however, which should bother us -- it is not Saul's faulty memory, but his detachment from the battle. I pointed out in

chapter 14 that Saul is “under *the* pomegranate tree” (verse 2), while Jonathan is on his way with his armor bearer to fight some of the Philistines. It is as though Saul found himself the most comfortable place to be rather than the most strategic place (which is where Jonathan is going). Now in chapter 17, David has just spoken with Saul and is going out to do battle with Goliath. Saul and his commander-in-chief watch from a distant vantage point. If anyone should be getting ready for battle, it would be these two men. Saul is the one whose duty is to go before the Israelites to battle; Abner, “the commander of the army,” is also to lead in battle. Yet these two men seem to look on from a safe distance, while David goes out to risk his life.

Here they are, Saul and Abner, sitting back at a safe distance chatting about the name of David’s father. Abner tells Saul he does not know. Saul tells Abner to check it out. And all the while, David is making his way toward Goliath. I can almost hear Saul turning to Abner, saying, “Pass the popcorn.” After David returns from killing Goliath, Abner brings David to Saul with Goliath’s head in his hands. Saul then asks David whose son he is, and he is told that his father’s name is Jesse, the Bethlehemite. This is most bizarre, is it not? What of the battle? Why are Saul and Abner not in the thick of it? How do they find the time to talk about such things as the name of David’s father at a time like this? Saul is not portrayed in a very favourable light. If anyone wants to be troubled, let them ponder what Saul and Abner are doing, and what they are not doing, rather than agonize about why they can’t remember the name of David’s father, a man they probably never met and whose name they may never have heard.

Conclusion

We are told what David thought in his heart when Samuel anointed him as Israel’s next king, Saul’s replacement. I can imagine that he must have felt a great deal like the virgin Mary when the angel Gabriel informed her that she was to become the mother of God’s promised Messiah. Her response was, “**How can this be, since I am a virgin?**” (Luke 1:34). David, likewise, must have thought: “How can I possibly become Israel’s king when I am but a young man, not even old enough to be in the army, and the only authority I have is over a small flock of sheep?” The last verses of chapter 16 begin to tell us how God will accomplish His will for David. Chapter 17 is another very significant part of the plan to make David king. It is marvellous to see how God goes about accomplishing His Word. And what God promises, God provides. His Word is sure.

We are inclined to look at the contest between David and Goliath as something unique, something very unusual. It is not. God gave specific instructions about such confrontations:

1 “When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots *and* people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you. 2 “Now it shall come about that when you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people. 3 “And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, 4 for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you’” (Deuteronomy 20:1-4).

Only a few verses later, God instructs the Israelites to identify anyone who is fainthearted so that he will not undermine the faith and confidence of his brethren (verse 8). The situation Saul and Israel face with the Philistines is not unusual. The problem is Saul’s fear and his lack of faith, which becomes contagious.

Is it not interesting that when Saul leads, his troops flee (see 1 Samuel 13:5-7)? Saul’s soldiers are frightened because Saul is terrified (17:11, 24). David, a lowly shepherd boy who is too young to be a soldier in Saul’s army, comes along and because of his faith and courage, inspires others to trust in God to work through him to kill Goliath and give Israel the victory. Notice the long list of heroes among Israel’s soldiers in 2 Samuel 23, after David becomes Israel’s king. There are many mighty men of valour under David’s leadership, to a great degree due to the faith and courage David personally demonstrates. I am fascinated to learn that there are a number of Goliath’s after he is killed, and that David’s men (like David) do them in:

18 Now it came about after this that there was war again with the Philistines at Gob; then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was among the descendants of the giant. 19 And there was war with the Philistines again at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam. 20 And there was war at Gath again, where there was a man of *great* stature who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; and he also had been born to the giant. 21 And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David’s brother, struck him down. 22 These four were born to the giant in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants (2 Samuel 21:18-22, NASB, compare 1 Chronicles 20:4-8).

This matter of killing giants seems to become almost routine. Once David stands up to Goliath, other mighty men of valour take on Goliath’s family members.

David's courage is contagious, as was Saul's cowardice. God did not intend for there be one giant who would be killed by David so that no Israelite had to face such a problem again. God purposed that David would stand up to the giant and kill him, giving other men the example and the faith to do likewise.

I contend that God will always have His "Davids" and that such men will always have their "Goliaths". Sometimes the "Goliaths" will be individuals; at other times, they will be nations, or even celestial powers. In each case, we must remember that **"the battle is the Lord's."** *It is He who goes before us, giving us the victory:*

30 "The LORD your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 31 and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as a man carries his son, in all the way which you have walked, until you came to this place.' 32 "But for all this, you did not trust the LORD your God, 33 who goes before you on *your* way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go" (Deuteronomy 1:30-33, NASB).

12 But you will not go out in haste, Nor will you go as fugitives; For the LORD will go before you, And the God of Israel *will be* your rear guard (Isaiah 52:12).

8 "Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard" (Isaiah 58:8).

7 "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria, nor because of all the multitude which is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. 8 "With him is *only* an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people relied on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah (2 Chronicles 32:7-8).

Our text has much to teach us about leadership, how it is developed, and how it is recognized. By birth order and family circumstances, David does not appear destined for leadership. But he is a man after God's own heart. God prepares David providentially, as he faithfully carries out his responsibility as a shepherd. When a lion or a bear attack one of his flock, he rescues it, taking on the bear or the lion to do so. In this process, *David learns to trust God and to use the weapons he has been given, a lesson for us as well.* David does not seek leadership; in a sense, it is thrust upon him. *David becomes a leader by being a good follower.* He goes to the battle scene, obeying the instructions of his father.

And when David sees the fear of the Israelites, he begins to seek to do something about it. When he hears Goliath blaspheme his God and intimidate the armies of the Lord, David purposes to fight Goliath in the name of the Lord. David does not seek leadership, but it is thrust upon him and he does not duck his responsibilities. How menial his shepherding may have seemed at times, but how well God used it to prepare him for facing Goliath in battle.

Our text teaches us about means and methods. We live in a day when men imitate the methods of other men. A man seems to have a successful business or ministry, and he writes a book telling others “how” he did it. Others read the book, wanting to be successful too, and then imitate the man’s methods. David does not fight Goliath with Saul’s weapons or with his methods. David fights Goliath with the methods he developed and practiced while caring for his sheep.

We often expect God to bring about the defeat of his enemies by the use of unusual, spectacular means. God did bring plagues upon the Egyptians and drown their army in the Red Sea. God used earthquakes and thunderstorms and floods. God is capable of delivering His people any way He chooses. But in the case of Goliath, God used a young man and a sling. These may not be impressive weapons in and of themselves, but David and his sling made a big impression on Goliath! When the more mundane means are employed by God, we should nevertheless remember that even our skill at shooting an arrow, or hurling a stone, or standing on slippery ground comes from Him:

30 As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the LORD is tried; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him. 31 For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God, 32 The God who girds me with strength, And makes my way blameless? 33 He makes my feet like hinds' *feet*, And sets me upon my high places. 34 He trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. 35 Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation, And Thy right hand upholds me; And Thy gentleness makes me great. 36 Thou dost enlarge my steps under me, And my feet have not slipped (Psalm 18:30-36).

Blessed be the LORD, my rock, Who trains my hands for war, *And* my fingers for battle (Psalm 144:1).

In the end, it is not so much that David is great, but that the God he serves, the God who went before him, is great. Saul seems to focus on the size of the enemy rather than on the size of God. *God always seems to give us enemies who are much greater than we are, so that we fight in our weakness, trusting in God and not in ourselves, giving Him the glory, rather than taking the credit ourselves.*

When we come to David, we come to God's chosen king. This is the one whose seed will be the promised Messiah, whose kingdom will have no end. And so David often provides us with a foreshadowing of Christ. Our text is no exception. David is a prototype of Christ, as Goliath is a prototype of Satan. Satan has the whole world trembling in fear of him and of death (see Hebrews 2:14-15). We, like the Israelites of old, are powerless to defeat him. What we cannot do for ourselves, Christ has done for us, just as David fought Goliath for Saul and the Israelites. Satan has a death grip on lost sinners. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Jesus came and took on Satan one-on-one, and He won the victory. David did it by killing Goliath. Jesus did it by being crucified on the cross of Calvary. But after He died to pay the penalty for our sins, He rose from the grave, triumphant over Satan, sin, and death. It was winner take all, and Jesus won by dying and by rising from the dead. *All who acknowledge their sin, and who forsake trusting in themselves by placing their trust in Jesus Christ, have the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of living eternally in His kingdom.* Thank God for our Champion, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Archaeological light

Slings in Old Testament warfare. Contrary to the childhood image of the slingshot, the shepherd's sling was a formidable weapon in Old Testament times. Jud 20:16 reports that the Benjamites could sling a stone within a hair's breadth either right or left-handed. Sling stones have been excavated at Tell Beit Mirsim and Megiddo that averaged approx. 4 inches in diameter and weighed over two pounds. Modern shepherds in the Middle East have demonstrated that the sling has a maximum range of 600 ft. And that the stones could be propelled over 100 mph.

18-20. David's fight from Saul

18:1-30. Jonathan's love for David

19:1-24. Saul's renewed attempt to kill David.

20:1-42. Jonathan protects David

1 Samuel 18:1-30

David "Has a Nice Day"

(18:1-5)

1 Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. 2 And Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his

father's house. 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. 4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. 5 So David went out wherever Saul sent him, *and* prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also the sight of Saul's servants.

This must have been a glorious day for David and a good day for Saul as well. The drawn-out stalemate between Israel and the Philistines has finally ended. Goliath, who frightens every Israelite soldier and proves to be a great embarrassment to Saul, is dead at the hand of David. This leads to a rout, with the bodies and spoils of the Philistines strewn from the battlefield to the gates of the principle cities of Philistia. When David returns from killing Goliath, he is brought before Saul by Abner. Saul ascertains, once again, who David's father is. I am not as certain as I once was that this was to forgive his father's taxes. It seems reasonable from the fact that Saul asks Jesse's permission to hire David part-time (16:19) that Saul would once again ask his father's permission to keep David with him full-time.

The conversation he has with his father, Saul, clinches matters for Jonathan (18:1). No doubt Jonathan is impressed by David's victory over Goliath, but David's words with his father seem to be what impresses Jonathan most. Is it David's faith in God? Is it the fact that David is careful to give the glory to God? Is it David's humility and humble spirit? Is it David's care for the people of Israel? We are not told exactly what impresses Jonathan so much in this conversation, but it is clear that from this point in time onward these two men are kindred spirits.

Only a wicked and perverse generation could see in the words of our text an occasion to imply that the relationship between David and Jonathan is perverted. David and Jonathan are soul-mates. Jonathan loves David as himself. Is this not the way every believer should feel toward his brethren? Jonathan and David make a covenant on this day. While the details are not supplied, it is not difficult to infer what they are. On his part, Jonathan seems to recognize that David is the one God has chosen to be Israel's next king. Jonathan is more than happy to relinquish his hopes for his father's throne in deference to God's choice – David.

I believe this is symbolized by Jonathan's gift of his clothing and armor to David. From the Old Testament, we know that Joseph's coat was a symbol of his authority (Genesis 37:3, 23). Before Aaron died, his priestly garments were removed, to be worn by his son, Eliezar (Numbers 20:22-28). Elijah placed his mantle over Elisha, who was to take his place (1 Kings 19:19-21).

In a footnote from his book, *Looking on the Heart*, Dale Ralph Davis refers to an Akkadian document, found at Ugarit, of a record about a thirteenth century king who divorced his wife. His son could choose which of the two of his parents he would live with, but if the crown prince chose to live with his mother, he had to relinquish his right to the throne. If he chose to live with his mother, and in so doing give up his right to the throne, he would indicate this symbolically by leaving his clothes on the throne. This seems to be so with Jonathan's gift of his robe and his armour to David. Here is a magnificent man, with a spirit like that of John the Baptist (John 3:30) and Barnabas.

Jonathan is willing to relinquish his right to the throne and to serve David as God's choice for the next king. No such spirit is found in Saul. At best, Saul is excited about David because of what David can do for him. As usual (see 14:52), Saul is eager to add skilled military men to his forces. Thus, Saul promotes David to a full-time employee. As far as the biblical record is concerned, nothing is done about the rewards Saul had offered the man who would do away with Goliath. David is a faithful servant of Saul, going wherever he is sent, and prospering as he goes. All the people are impressed with David, even Saul's servants (who must do so with a certain measure of risk, knowing how jealous Saul can be – see 16:2). David has the "Midas touch." It is as though everything he touches prospers, and so it does because the hand of God is upon him (verse 12).

**The Musicians Produce a Sour Note,
and the Dancers Step on Saul's Toes
(18:6-9)**

6 And it happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. 7 And the women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands." 8 Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" 9 And Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on.

You may have heard the words of a not-so-new song, "What a difference a day makes. . . ." Nothing could be more true of our text. It is hard to believe how short-lived David's popularity is with Saul. One day, David steps forward in faith and defeats Goliath, which results in Israel's victory over the Philistines (chapter 17). In the very midst of the celebration of this victory,⁷⁷ Israelite women sing a victory song, and Saul's respect and appreciation sours, leading to

numerous attempts to put David to death. Verses 6-9 describe this watershed event, which forever changes the course of history for David and for Saul.

David apparently joined the Israelites as they pursued the fleeing Philistines and is now on his way back. Saul may not have even gone out with his troops as the final verses of chapter 17 seem to imply. If this were the case, the women of all the cities of Israel **“came out singing and dancing to meet Saul”** where he has been all along, and to greet David and the Israelite warriors as they return from pursuing the fleeing Philistines.

No one would have predicted the outcome of this celebration. This singing and celebration by the women does not seem to be unusual in Israel. We see it at the time God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea (see Exodus 15:1-21). The lyrics of the hastily composed song include this refrain:

“Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands.”

The first question we should ask is, “Is this true? Does Saul kill only thousands, while David kills his ten thousands?” While probably some poetic license is involved, I am inclined to think that in essence the lyrics are true. We know from chapter 14 that Israel’s victory over the Philistines is minimized due to Saul’s foolish decree that his soldiers not eat until evening. David’s victory (the victory Israel won because of David’s defeat of Goliath) seems more decisive. It seems that anything Saul does, or has done, David does better.

Do the women mean anything by what they are singing? I hardly think so. They are jubilant, rejoicing over the victory God has given them. Saul has contributed much in previous times; David has just contributed more. Saul, the man who was less than eager to become first in the land, is now greatly distressed that the people consider him second and David first. Here is a man who has been told that his kingdom will end, and he now has a very strong premonition (if the anointing of David has not become known to him somehow) that David is the one who will replace him. The women are singing and dancing, but Saul is not tapping his toe. His toes have been stepped on, and the song is not one that makes him wish to “sing along.” Everyone else is celebrating, joyful at the victory God brings about through David -- except Saul. There is now a very ugly look on his face, and from this moment on, he looks upon David with a suspicious eye.

Murder By a Maniac
or
Why Can't David Get the Point!
(18:10-12)

10 Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing *the harp* with his hand, as usual; and a spear *was* in Saul's hand. 11 And Saul hurled the spear for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David escaped from his presence twice. 12 Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul.

We all know that Saul has some really bad days brought about by the **"evil spirit from the Lord,"** which comes on him from time to time. David is hired, part-time, to play his harp for Saul and thus to calm his troubled soul (16:14-23). David is now a full-time employee of Saul, and part of his duties are to continue playing the harp when Saul is troubled. The trouble with Saul's troubles is that David has become his biggest problem (in his mind, at least). Saul's jealousy turns to murder in verses 10-12.

Before looking more carefully at these verses, a comment about the relationship between verses 6-9 and verses 10-12 may be helpful. Saul is jealous in verses 6-9, and the evil spirit is said to come upon him in verses 10-12. Some imply, or even insist, that demons are the source of most evils. I have heard of the "demon of jealousy," the "demon of alcoholism," the "demon of pride," and so on. I am not trying to say that demon activity cannot produce such manifestations, but I must say that the Bible tells us these things come not from Satan, but from our own fleshly nature (see Galatians 5:16-21). In our text, Saul's jealousy (verses 6-9) precedes the coming of the evil spirit mightily upon Saul (verse 10). I take it that the spirit's coming upon Saul is to some degree a result of Saul's jealousy. I believe Satan is an opportunist, who takes advantage of human weaknesses and sins (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 2:10-11). The use of illegal drugs (and perhaps some legal ones), surrendering oneself to illicit sex or to fits of rage, or other evils may well open the door for satanic and demonic attack. Let us be careful not to give Satan too much credit by making him the cause of evil, rather than an opportunist who simply promotes and enhances the evil within our fallen natures.

I am indebted to Dale Ralph Davis for suggesting that Saul's murderous actions toward David in verses 10-12 (as in the entire chapter) are not yet recognized as such by David or others. Let me suggest why I agree with him. *First*, Saul's intention to kill David is not even known to his son Jonathan until the first verse of chapter 19. Repeatedly the author tells us what Saul's true motives are, as he

does here in verse 11. But this is necessary only if Saul's intentions are not apparent. Saul does have fits brought on by the **"evil spirit,"** but up to this point, it seems as though only Saul is affected. He is terrorized (16:14). Now, all of a sudden, Saul's "fits" are homicidal acts – a spear thrown twice at David. I can hear Saul's servants excuse him by saying, "You'll have to excuse Saul, he's just not himself today." I contend that he is himself.

Part of the problem stems, in my opinion, from the translation, **"raved,"** in verse 10. The Hebrew term occurs over 100 times in the Old Testament. In the NASB, it is rendered **"raved"** only twice (here and in 1 Kings 18:29). It is never rendered "raved" in the King James Version. It is virtually always rendered **"prophecy"** in some form. The term can refer to the prophesying of a true prophet (e.g. Numbers 11:25-26; 1 Chronicles 25:2), or the deceptive prophecies of a false prophet (e.g. 1 Kings 22:10). It appears that even when some true prophets prophesied, they behaved in a different manner (see 1 Samuel 19:18-24), which might be considered "raving" by an onlooker.

The problem with the translation, **"raved,"** in our text is that it can too easily be misunderstood as some form of temporary insanity. Indeed, this may well be the way Saul's behaviour appears. It also could be what Saul wants people to think concerning his behaviour. After all, if Saul "acts crazy" while throwing a spear at David, killing him in what seems to be a fit of insanity or an uncontrollable action prompted by the evil spirit, Saul is off the hook. The problem with viewing Saul as temporarily insane here is that we are told what he is thinking at the time he throws the spear at David: **"I will pin David to the wall"** (verse 11). Saul knows exactly what he is doing, and he does exactly what he intends. I must therefore wonder if Saul does not actually prophesy, perhaps in a way that is like the demons in the New Testament:

33 And there was a man in the synagogue possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 34 "Ha! What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!" (Luke 4:33-34).

If Saul thus prophesies, he realizes that David is the coming king, which could prompt him to feign madness and seek to kill David in a way that looks like an uncontrollable fit brought on by a demonic spirit. In spite of Saul's two-fold attempts to kill David, it does not work. Once again, David succeeds while Saul fails:

David: One stone hits Goliath between the eyes

Saul: Misses David with his spear in two tries

Because the Lord is with David, he cannot be killed before his time; because the Lord has left Saul, he cannot do anything right.

Kill ‘Em With Kindness

or

Murder in the Military

1 Samuel 18:13-30

13 Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14 And David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD *was* with him. 15 When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him. 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, and he went out and came in before them. 17 Then Saul said to David, “Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the LORD'S battles.” For Saul thought, “My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” 18 But David said to Saul, “Who am I, and what is my life *or* my father's family in Israel, that I should be the king's son-in-law?” 19 So it came about at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife. 20 Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. When they told Saul, the thing was agreeable to him. 21 And Saul thought, “I will give her to him that she may become a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” Therefore Saul said to David, “For a second time you may be my son-in-law today.” 22 Then Saul commanded his servants, “Speak to David secretly, saying, 'Behold, the king delights in you, and all his servants love you; now therefore, become the king's son-in-law.'” 23 So Saul's servants spoke these words to David. But David said, “Is it trivial in your sight to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?” 24 And the servants of Saul reported to him according to these words *which* David spoke. 25 Saul then said, “Thus you shall say to David, 'The king does not desire any dowry except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king's enemies.'” Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. 26 When his servants told David these words, it pleased David to become the king's son-in-law. Before the days had expired 27 David rose up and went, he and his men, and struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave him Michal his daughter for a wife. 28 When Saul saw and knew that the

LORD was with David, and *that* Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, 29 then Saul was even more afraid of David. Thus Saul was David's enemy continually. 30 Then the commanders of the Philistines went out *to battle*, and it happened as often as they went out, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed.

The mere sight of David in his home infuriates Saul, but he cannot seem to kill him there either, so he attempts to get David out of sight by making him a commander of a thousand. It is difficult to see this as a demotion in the overall scheme of this chapter, though it could be. I am inclined instead to see this as an apparent promotion. Saul thereby appears to show kindness to David, while in reality he is seeking an occasion to be rid of him. If the Philistines or some other enemy does not kill David, at least he will be out of sight, and hopefully out of the Israelites' minds. Again, it simply does not work that way. Wherever David is sent, God causes him to prosper so that his status with the people continues to be enhanced. All of this is observed by Saul, whose fear of David continues to grow.

Saul must think he is on the right track in seeking to have David killed at the hand of one of Israel's enemies, but he needs to entice David to attempt a more dangerous mission which is more certain of being too much for him. So Saul offers his daughter Merab to David as his wife (verse 17). This is not a gift from Saul in response to David's killing Goliath. It should be (17:25), but it is not. It is as though Saul has forgotten his promise. Saul makes this look like a new offer, and all David needs to do is "earn" Merab by being **"a valiant man for Saul and fighting the Lord's battles"** (verse 17).

Saul certainly is not prepared for David's response. David rejects Saul's offer. It is not that David is reluctant to endanger himself in battle. This he does willingly, without expectations of rewards such as a wife from the daughters of Saul. David is a truly humble man who considers his station in life unworthy of such a gift, and so he declines. Due to his decline of Saul's offer, Merab is given to another man as his wife. This is not the result of Saul's change of mind or his broken promise (not that Saul is incapable of such things), but the text simply does not support such a conclusion. A time is set, a deadline is given, within which David must meet certain criteria (see verses 19, 26). Because David declines Saul's offer, he does not meet the requirements within the set time, and thus Merab is given to Adriel (verse 19). This does not reflect negatively on Saul as much as it does positively on David.

Greatly disappointed, Saul is sure that if he can get David interested in one of his daughters, David will do something foolish enough to get himself killed in

battle. How happy Saul is when he hears that his younger daughter Michal is madly in love with David. This is his second chance. Since Michal is more than willing to marry David, with a little encouragement David just might accept the offer this time. There is still hope of getting rid of David.

This time, Saul is much more thorough. He offers Michal to David and then instructs his servants to promote the idea with David so that he will accept the offer this time. His servants speak to David, telling him that the king really likes him, and that everyone wants him to become the king's son-in-law. David responds as we should expect, by pointing out his humble standing in life and his inability to pay an appropriate dowry for such a noble woman. What he could afford to pay would be an insult to Michal and to Saul. Here is where Saul appeals to David: he does not want David's money -- David can pay the dowry in different currency -- Philistine foreskins! Now this catches David's interest. He wants Michal, and he is eager to do battle for the Lord, so he accepts the offer. Instead of getting himself killed, however, David fights the Philistines and presents the king with double the number of foreskins he requests.

Much to his distress, Saul now must give David his daughter's hand in marriage. This represents more than just having his plans fail, again -- and even worse, David succeeds, again. Now Saul, who greatly fears David and wants him eliminated, has two of his own family members bound to David by love and a covenant. The chapter begins with the account of Jonathan's love for David and his covenant with him. The chapter now ends with Michal's love for David and her marriage covenant with him. Somehow David has managed to win over two members of Saul's immediate family. Now, the very ones Saul assumed he could depend on to help him be rid of David are on David's side. Saul, his plans, and his kingdom are falling apart.

The marriage Saul offers to David is designed as an incentive for David to engage in bold military actions, and so he does. The only problem is that these dangerous duties do not rid Saul of David; they only serve to elevate David above all of the other military commanders. David acts more wisely than all of them, and because of this, he is highly esteemed.

Conclusion

Let us now step back for a broader look at what chapter 18 describes. *First*, in a most unusual and unexpected way, God is bringing to pass the things He has purposed and promised. In chapters 13 and 15, God indicates to Saul that his kingdom will end. In our text, we watch his reign unravel. Saul continues to lose a grip on his own life and on his kingdom. David is anointed as the new king of Israel in chapter 16, and we see how God prepares the way for David's reign. David has very close links with Saul and his palace. Now, he is closely

associated with two more members of Saul's royal family, his son (now a close friend) and his daughter (now David's wife). David now has authority in Saul's army, and through experience, shows himself to be a brave man and a great leader. David is on his way up, and Saul is on his way down. It is not the way we expected this to happen, but then God's plans seldom come about in ways we expect (see Isaiah 55:8-11; Romans 11:33-36; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

A *second* observation from our text is that God's Word is absolutely certain and sure. God warns Saul of discipline to come if he does not repent, and Saul most certainly does not repent. God sees to it that Saul's kingdom will be removed, in spite of Saul's fervent efforts to prevent it. On the other hand, God has promised David a kingdom, and our text assures us that nothing short of the complete fulfilment of God's promise should be expected. *God keeps His promises, whether for prosperity and blessing, or for judgment.*

Third, in Jonathan we see a most excellent illustration of the love which God requires of us. We are repeatedly instructed to **"love our neighbor as ourselves"** (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19; 22:39, Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). This is precisely what Jonathan does with respect to David (see verse 1). Thus, Jonathan is an example to us of how we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. I do not see any reference to Jonathan loving himself first, as a kind of prerequisite to loving others. I do see self-sacrifice as Jonathan willingly gives up his kingdom to David (not to mention his robe and his armor). Jonathan is a loyal and faithful friend, and he will risk his own life to save David's life. What a selfless, noble man this Jonathan is. So far as the Bible is concerned, his actions are not "above and beyond the call of duty;" they are the fulfillment of his duty, and ours.

Fourth, we see in Saul what we see in our Lord's disciples during His earthly ministry, and what we often see in the church today – competition, jealousy, and self-assertion. David is the most faithful servant Saul has ever had, and yet Saul is threatened by David's competence, by David's success. The disciples were continually seeking to assert themselves, arguing over who was the greatest, and angry when another disciple seemed to outdo them. In the church today, God has purposely given each Christian a spiritual gift or gifts, to enable him or her to excel in a certain ministry. We can either rejoice in the strengths God has given others, and seek to benefit from their ministries, or we can resist them with a competitive spirit. One has to wonder how much the criticism of other Christians, their ministry, and their doctrine is really rooted in jealousy and envy, rather than in faithfulness to God and His Word. Let us beware of jealousy, no matter how pious the label we give it or its manifestations.

Jonathan and Saul each illustrate the two logical responses to the fact that Jesus is God's King. David is God's choice for Israel's next king. Saul seems to know this, and he strongly opposes it, even to the point of endeavoring to put David to death. Jonathan seems to know this as well, and even though it means that David will reign in his place, Jonathan enters into a covenant relationship with David and relinquishes his right to reign.

God has appointed His Son, Jesus Christ, to establish the Kingdom of God and to rule over every creature on this earth, as well as in heaven. Like Saul, we can seek to prolong our own reign and resist the inevitable reign of God's King. If we do, we do so to our own destruction. Or we can relinquish any thought of reigning and submit to God's King, the Lord Jesus Christ, as Jonathan submitted to David. *The only right choice is to relinquish any thought of attempting to maintain control and authority over our own lives, and to submit to Him alone who is qualified to reign. These are the only two choices God gives us.* To fail to take Christ seriously is to reject His rule. To resist Christ's reign is to bring judgment upon ourselves. To submit to Him is to enter into life eternal. Which will you choose? Whom will you be like --Saul or Jonathan? You will make no more important decision in life than this.

1 Samuel 18:30-19:24

Rescued by Reason

(18:30—19:7)

30 Then the commanders of the Philistines went out *to battle*, and it happened as often as they went out, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed. 19:1 Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death. But Jonathan, Saul's son, greatly delighted in David. 2 So Jonathan told David saying, "Saul my father is seeking to put you to death. Now therefore, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself. 3 "And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you; if I find out anything, then I shall tell you." 4 Then Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, "Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds *have been* very beneficial to you. 5 "For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; you saw *it* and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood, by putting David to death without a cause?" 6 And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul vowed, "As the LORD lives, he shall not

be put to death.” 7 Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these words. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as formerly.

The one thing Saul cannot stand in his servants is their success. Like Satan, Saul does not take well to being in second place (see Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). And so when the Israelite commanders go out to battle, David is among them (see 18:13), and he does better than all of them (18:30). Without intending to do so, David continues to grow in fame. His wisdom (undoubtedly the product of the Spirit; see 16:13) sets him apart from all the other commanders. He is a man highly esteemed.

This is just what Saul fears most. Abandoning his cloak and dagger tactics, Saul now orders his servants – including Jonathan – to kill David. Jonathan has made a covenant with David, which he most certainly does not intend to break. But the underlying reason Jonathan does David no harm is because he “greatly delighted in David.” Protecting David is more than Jonathan’s duty; Jonathan delights in David. He truly loves David as himself (18:1). Jonathan sets out then to reverse his father’s order to kill David. If need be, Jonathan will violate this command, but he would far rather reason with his father to revoke it. This he accomplishes in verses 1-7.

Jonathan first warns David, informing him of his father’s orders. He urges David to be on guard and hide himself until after he can speak to his father. Strangely, he tells David he will meet with his father in the very same area where David is to hide (verses 2-3). Is this so David can observe the whole thing? Does Jonathan want to assure David that nothing is going on behind his back? In addition, he promises to report the outcome of his discussion to David.

Jonathan’s dealings with his father on behalf of David are a model for us in several regards. *First*, we find here an example of a friend who loves his neighbour as himself. Confronting (or should we say “crossing”) Saul is dangerous business (see 16:2, 4; 20:33; 22:11-19), yet Jonathan does it. *Second*, Jonathan subordinates himself and his own personal interests (e.g. in the throne) to those of David (see 23:17). *Third*, Jonathan is a faithful and submissive son to his father, Saul. Jonathan approaches his father directly and speaks to him with respect. He speaks well of David. He appeals for David’s life on the one hand, but on the other he appeals to his father to do that which is in his own best interest. He reminds Saul that David is his most faithful and devoted servant, whose actions have always benefited Saul. He also reminds his father that when David killed Goliath, he rejoiced in David’s victory, because it was Saul’s victory as well (19:5). To act in a hostile manner against David would not be

just or wise, and even worse, it would be sin, for it would be shedding innocent blood (19:4-5).

For the moment, Saul is persuaded by Jonathan's reasoning. He swears that "**as the Lord lives**" David will not be put to death (verse 6). It is not a promise that will last long, but it is a temporary and partial admission of guilt on Saul's part and a confession of David's innocence. Jonathan calls David, tells him about the meeting with his father and its outcome, and then brings him back into his father's presence. For a short time, at least, things are like they used to be (verse 7).

A Providential Rescue

(19:8-10)

8 When there was war again, David went out and fought with the Philistines, and defeated them with great slaughter, so that they fled before him. 9 Now there was an evil spirit from the LORD on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing *the harp* with *his* hand. 10 And Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.

Saul seems to want to have it both ways: he does not seem eager to go out with his men to fight the Philistines, yet, when David goes out against the Philistines and comes back as a hero, Saul is overcome with jealousy and anger. There is no indication that Saul goes to war against the Philistines, but we do know that David goes, and that he wins a decisive victory (verse 8). This brings about a virtual rerun of chapter 18, verses 6-9. An "**evil spirit from the Lord**" comes upon Saul, who is sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. (David is in the house too, with a harp in his hand – verse 9.) Filled with jealousy, Saul attempts to pin David to the wall with his spear, but David somehow manages to slip away and escape from Saul's presence into the darkness, thus escaping death one more time (verse 10).

The close relationship between Saul's jealousy toward David, and the coming upon Saul of the "**evil spirit from the Lord**" in verse 9, is worth noting. We know that this "**evil spirit from the Lord**" comes upon Saul with the departure of the Holy Spirit (16:14-15). We also know that this spirit does not possess Saul to the same extent at all times. Formerly, when the spirit came upon Saul, David was summoned to play his harp, and the spirit would depart (16:23). While we know that David's harp playing caused the spirit to leave Saul, we are

not told why the spirit came upon him. Saul's jealousy and anger may have been the cause of the spirit coming on him, perhaps even more than the result. When Saul is "filled with" with jealousy or anger, the spirit would come upon him at that time, when Saul was more vulnerable. *When we surrender self-control, whether by anger, greed, drugs, or sexual immorality (to name a few examples), we open ourselves up to satanic or demonic influences.* I believe this is why Saul is overcome by the evil spirit when he reacts uncontrollably to the success of David at war.

David Is at the End of His Rope

or

David's Big Let Down

(19:11-17)

11 Then Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, in order to put him to death in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death." 12 So Michal let David down through a window, and he went out and fled and escaped. 13 And Michal took the household idol and laid *it* on the bed, and put a quilt of goats' *hair* at its head, and covered *it* with clothes. 14 When Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." 15 Then Saul sent messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me on his bed, that I may put him to death." 16 When the messengers entered, behold, the household idol *was* on the bed with the quilt of goats' *hair* at its head. 17 So Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go! Why should I put you to death?'"

David may have escaped into the night, but Saul is in no mood to give up his plan to capture and kill him. Saul puts some of his men on a stakeout outside David's house. Their orders are to wait until morning and then put David to death. David seems to feel safe once he reaches his own home. Michal knows her father better. She emphatically informs David that unless he escapes during darkness, he will not live another day. Now is the time for David to make his escape. I can almost visualize Michal standing there confronting David, with her hands on her hips, telling her more naive husband how things are with daddy.

David's reticence may be related to the only way he is able escape. It will not be a very dignified retreat for David. If he is to live, he must leave his dignity behind. Their house must have been located along the wall of the city. Michal

has to lower her husband down through a window so that he reaches the ground below, outside the city walls, and disappears into the darkness of night.

The other side of his escape is not so glorious either. It is one thing to get David out of the house and into the night unnoticed. But Michal also knows that she must buy David some time to enable him to make his escape good. When the servants of Saul arrive at the door, Michal is ready for them. She has all of her props in place. On the bed, Michal has positioned an idol so that it gives the appearance of David's form under some of David's clothes, with a goats' hair quilt at the head. From a distance, without being able to look too closely, one would assume it is David lying very still in bed, perhaps quite ill.

The messengers Saul sent return and report what Michal has told them. Saul is more suspicious, so he sends messengers back to Michal's house to bring David to him so he can personally put him to death. This must have been quite a scene when these fellows ripped off the covers, only to find a household idol cleverly placed to deceive them. With red faces, perhaps, Saul's messengers return to tell him they have been fooled. Saul is angry with his daughter for deceiving him and for letting David escape. Michal again attempts to deceive her father by telling him David threatened to kill her if she did not cooperate. This fits very nicely into Saul's distorted estimation of David, though it is far from the truth.

There certainly is a touch of humour in this rescue. It shows how futile Saul's plans to kill David are. We should pause for a moment to remember how David got his wife. Earlier when Goliath made fun of Saul and the army of Israel, the king offered his daughter to the man who would stand up against Goliath and kill him (17:25). By all rights, David should have had one of Saul's daughters for a wife back then. After David becomes famous in the land and Saul becomes jealous of him, Saul makes David another offer of a wife:

17 Then Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the LORD'S battles." For Saul thought, "My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him" (1 Samuel 18:17).

David declines that offer, sincerely believing he is unworthy to have one of Saul's daughters as his wife, and also well aware that he cannot pay the dowry she should require (18:18; see also verse 23).

The next time Saul offers one of his daughters to David, he is much more shrewd about the way in which he goes about it:

20 Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. When they told Saul, the thing was agreeable to him. 21 And Saul thought, "I will give her to him that she may become a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David, "For a second time you may be my son-in-law today." 22 Then Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David secretly, saying, 'Behold, the king delights in you, and all his servants love you; now therefore, become the king's son-in-law.'" 23 So Saul's servants spoke these words to David. But David said, "Is it trivial in your sight to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?" 24 And the servants of Saul reported to him according to these words *which* David spoke. 25 Saul then said, "Thus you shall say to David, 'The king does not desire any dowry except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king's enemies.'" Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. 26 When his servants told David these words, it pleased David to become the king's son-in-law. Before the days had expired 27 David rose up and went, he and his men, and struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave him Michal his daughter for a wife (1 Samuel 18:20-27).

When it becomes clear that David wants to marry Michal, and that he will gladly obtain the required number (actually, twice the required number = 200) of Philistine foreskins, Saul is ecstatic. He is certain that Michal's love for David (and his for her) will be the death of David, as he tries to kill this many Philistines. Once again, Saul's plan backfires. David obtains the Philistine foreskins (times two), and now he has one of Saul's own daughters for his wife. She loves her husband and will not willingly be a part of any plot to kill him. More than this, she is the one who saves David from his father. Once again, Saul has just shot (or should I say speared) himself in the foot, trying to kill the Lord's anointed. I don't hear Saul laughing, but there must have been much more than a snicker in the courts of heaven.

As we leave this rescue by Michal, we should not overlook Psalm 59, which is David's reflection on his deliverance here. While we dare not attempt to deal with this psalm in detail, a couple of observations can be made. *First*, you will notice that Michal is never mentioned in the psalm. It is not that she is somehow being snubbed by David, as though she did not take part in the rescue. David is not looking at the immediate cause of his deliverance in this psalm, but the ultimate cause – God. Thus, David praises God for saving his life. *Second*, the

description of David's pursuers makes it sound as though they are Gentiles, rather than Jews (see Psalm 59:5-8). I would not be surprised if the men Saul sent to capture David were Gentiles. We know that Saul hired mercenaries (see 1 Samuel 14:52). Such men have no reservations in helping put David to death, where Israelites might. How fitting too that Saul (a Jew) would utilize such mercenaries (Gentiles) to oppose God's king, just as the Jewish religious leaders later do in opposing Christ. Finally, David speaks of these men who seek his capture as liars (Psalm 59:12). Were these men some of those who falsely accuse David before Saul (see 1 Samuel 24:9; 26:19)?

A Religious Rescue: Saved By the Spirit

or

A Very Prophetable Effort

(19:18-24)

18 Now David fled and escaped and came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth. 19 And it was told Saul, saying, "Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah." 20 Then Saul sent messengers to take David, but when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing *and* presiding over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul; and they also prophesied. 21 And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. So Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. 22 Then he himself went to Ramah, and came as far as the large well that is in Secu; and he asked and said, "Where are Samuel and David?" And *someone* said, "Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah." 23 And he proceeded there to Naioth in Ramah; and the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually until he came to Naioth in Ramah. 24 And he also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Michal's efforts at delaying David's pursuers pays off. David escapes into the night and flees to Ramah, where he meets Samuel and tells him all Saul has done to him. He and Samuel then leave Ramah and go to Naioth. Word reaches Saul that David and Samuel are at Naioth in Ramah, and so the king sends some of his men to arrest David. When these men arrive at Naioth, they encounter a group of prophets who are prophesying. Samuel is among them, presiding over

the group. The Spirit of God then comes upon the men whom Saul has sent to capture David, and they also begin to prophesy.

We are not told what these men do who are overcome by the Spirit, other than prophesy, but we can venture a guess that may not be too far off the mark. We know for certain that these men do not arrest David or harm Saul. If these men prophesy, it is reasonable to suppose that their words include praising God. It is also possible that they prophesy concerning Israel's next king. If these men, under the control of God's Spirit, proclaim David as Israel's next king, how can they possibly take part in Saul's plan to kill him? From Saul's point of view, this first group of men is a write off.

Saul does not learn his lessons very well. We do not know exactly what the report is that comes to Saul about his first "posse" sent to arrest David. The text only indicates that **"it was told Saul."** If Saul is informed about the Spirit of God coming upon these men and that they prophesied, he does not get the message this should convey. So he sends a second party to arrest David. (We can be sure that he chooses men who are not as inclined to be "spiritual" this time.) Yet when this second group of men arrives, the very same thing happens to them. Saul then sends a third party, only to have the same thing repeated again.

Saul simply does not yet grasp that his efforts are futile. If on his last effort, Saul said to himself, "The third time is a charm," this time Saul must have thought, "If you want a job done right, you just have to do it yourself." And so Saul arrives at Ramah and gets as far as the large well which is at Secu. There he asks where Samuel and David can be found. He is told they are both at Naioth in Ramah, and so he proceeds on toward Naioth in Ramah. While on his way, the Spirit of God comes upon Saul himself, and the king prophesies all the way to his destination.

That must have been quite a sight. Saul surely was greatly aggravated that he had sent out three parties of men to arrest David, and that none succeeded. Now, he is determined to get the job done himself. Can you imagine the mood he must be in as he approaches the place where David and Samuel are staying? Suddenly the Spirit of God overcomes Saul so that he strips off his clothing, laying naked before Samuel all the rest of the day and through the night.

Does Saul intend to kill David and remove him as a threat to his throne? Saul cannot even succeed at arresting David, and now he may even be prophesying that David will surely become king. Does Saul come in his role as king with all

of his power and authority, determined to accomplish his plan? He now lays naked before Samuel.

Word of Saul's arrival and his unexpected conduct circulates quickly. I imagine the people who hear of it come to see for themselves, and see they do. Saul does not seem so tough in the buff (pardon the pun). I am most interested in the question on the lips of all who see Saul in this spiritual state: **"Is Saul also among the prophets?"** (verse 24).

How can Saul's coming and his conduct be explained? Does everyone there know that Saul is seeking to kill David? If they do not, then Saul's coming and his conduct are even more mysterious. What other reason could there be for Saul to act like a prophet, among the prophets? We know. No man can be controlled by the Spirit of God and carry out his demonic plan to kill God's anointed. Here is one way that God can insure the safety of David. Even when trying to do the job himself, Saul cannot succeed in preventing what God has purposed. As the glorified Christ said to a later "Saul" [Paul, the apostle], **"It is hard to kick against the goads"** (Acts 26:14).

We should notice one more thing about this final paragraph of chapter 19, and that is its similarity to an incident which occurred earlier in Saul's life:

5 "Afterward you will come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is; and it shall be as soon as you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them, and they will be prophesying. 6 "Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. 7 "And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you. 8 "And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do." 9 Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart; and all those signs came about on that day. 10 When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them. 11 And it came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" 12 And a man there answered and said, "Now, who is their father?" *Therefore it*

became a proverb: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Samuel 10:5-12, emphasis mine).

Does it not seem just a little too coincidental for this expression, found in chapter 10, to be virtually repeated in chapter 19? The first occasion is at the outset of Saul’s reign as Israel’s king. The Spirit of God was to come upon Saul as proof that he was God’s choice for king, and also to empower him to serve as Israel’s king. Saul’s heart is changed by this and he **“became another man”** (10:6, 9-10). The Spirit of God comes upon Saul as he comes upon a **“group of prophets”** (10:5, 10). When Saul prophesies with the other prophets, the people who witness this are surprised and say, **“What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?”** (10:11). This saying then becomes a proverb among the people (10:12).

The similarities between the two incidents are striking, even though separated by a number of years. In both cases, the Spirit of God comes upon Saul, and he prophesies with other prophets. Those who witness this event are surprised and ask, **“Is Saul also among the prophets.”** In neither case does the prophecy phenomenon last more than a day or so, and then it ends (much like what we see in Numbers 11:16-30).

There are also differences, however. The first prophecy phenomenon comes at the very outset of Saul’s service as Israel’s king. In fact, the Spirit’s coming upon Saul is one evidence that God has prepared him to carry out his duties as king (compare Numbers 11:16-30). It seems to be a kind of accreditation of Saul as the king of Israel. The second and last prophecy phenomenon comes late in Saul’s career, after Saul has been told that his kingship will end. When Saul prophesies this last time, it is more of an accreditation of David (backhanded as it may appear) than of Saul. It is almost as though God uses the first prophecy phenomenon as proof that Saul is the king, and the last instance as proof that his reign is nearly over. Here is something for us to think about further.

Conclusion

On this Sunday before Christmas, one may well wonder why I did not set this series in 1 Samuel aside and preach a “Christmas message,” as I have sometimes done. As I studied this text, I realized just how much like the “first Christmas” this story actually is. We have David, whom God has chosen and anointed as the King of Israel. King Saul knows that David is God’s king, and because of this, he feels threatened, even though David does not seek to remove Saul to reign in his place. In his jealousy, Saul sets out to kill David, and no matter how hard he tries to capture and kill him, his plans always fail. There is no way that David –

God's King – is going to be destroyed by a man like Saul, or anyone else. In a sense, we might say that David leads a charmed life, because it is God's purpose for him to become the next king.

The Christmas story is about another King, the "Son of David," whom God appointed to rule over His people Israel. When this King was born, magi from the east sought to find Him in order to worship Him. King Herod, along with all the people of Jerusalem, is greatly troubled (not delighted!) that these noble men from the east are seeking "the King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:1-3). King Herod calls the religious leaders of the Jews, seeking to learn the place where this "King" can be found. He also tells the magi to let him know where they find this "King." He does this not to worship the Lord Jesus (as do the magi), but to kill Him. Herod is so intent on removing this "King," whom he perceives to be a threat to his kingdom, that he kills every male child in the area of Bethlehem in the hope that the "King" is among them. In spite of all his best efforts, Herod fails.

Like King Saul, Herod does not learn the lesson which every earthly king should understand: God's appointed ruler, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, cannot be defeated or destroyed. This is the lesson taught in the second Psalm:

1 Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed: 3 "Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us!" 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury: 6 "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain." 7 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee. 8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the *very* ends of the earth as Thy possession. 9 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'"

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. 11 Worship the LORD with reverence, And rejoice with trembling. 12 Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalm 2:1-12)

The wise men from the east are right, and Herod (like Saul) is dead wrong. One cannot defeat God's appointed King. And that King is Jesus Christ. He will

come again, and He will overcome His foes. He will then reign over all. Those who submit to Him as God's anointed and appointed King will reign with Him; he will shatter those who resist.

The babe in the manger, Jesus Christ, is the promised Messiah, the King who will rule over all. He is also the descendant of David. God not only appoints David as the King of Israel, He appoints him as the one through whom the King will be born. How foolish it is for Saul to try to destroy David. As Saul falls prostrate and humble before the prophet Samuel, so every one who resists Jesus Christ, God's King, will one day fall before Him and profess Him to be the King of Kings:

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

This is the message of Christmas. This is the message of the gospel. God has sent His Son to become the Saviour of the world. He will send Him a second time to be the King of Kings. All those who reject Jesus as their Savior will be His enemies when He comes again. And all who resist Him now will one day fall before Him as the One who has defeated them. All those who receive Him now as God's only means of salvation from their sin will reign with Him when He returns. If Saul teaches us anything, it is that it is foolish to resist God's appointed King. Let us not make the same mistake.

1 Samuel 20:1-42

David Proposes a Test

(20:1-23)

1 Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?" 2 And he said to him, "Far from it, you shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without

disclosing it to me. So why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!” 3 Yet David vowed again, saying, “Your father knows well that I have found favor in your sight, and he has said, ‘Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.’ But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death.” 4 Then Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you say, I will do for you.” 5 So David said to Jonathan, “Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening. 6 “If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family.’ 7 “If he says, ‘It is good,’ your servant *shall be* safe; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil. 8 “Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; for why then should you bring me to your father?” 9 And Jonathan said, “Far be it from you! For if I should indeed learn that evil has been decided by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you about it?” 10 Then David said to Jonathan, “Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?” 11 And Jonathan said to David, “Come, and let us go out into the field.” So both of them went out to the field. 12 Then Jonathan said to David, “The LORD, the God of Israel, *be witness!* When I have sounded out my father about this time tomorrow, *or* the third day, behold, if there is good *feeling* toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you? 13 “If it please my father *to do* you harm, may the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also, if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. 14 “And if I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die? 15 “And you shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” 16 So Jonathan made a *covenant* with the house of David, *saying*, “ May the LORD require *it* at the hands of David's enemies.” 17 And Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life. 18 Then Jonathan said to him, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed because your seat will be empty. 19 “When you have stayed for three days, you shall go down quickly and come to the place where you hid yourself on that eventful day, and you shall remain by the stone Ezel. 20 “And I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target. 21 “And behold, I will send the lad, *saying*, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I specifically say to the lad, ‘Behold, the arrows are on this side of you, get them, ‘then come; for

there is safety for you and no harm, as the LORD lives. 22 “But if I say to the youth, ‘Behold, the arrows are beyond you,’ go, for the LORD has sent you away. 23 “As for the agreement of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever.”

I wish I could say I understand why David “**fled**” from Ramah to find Jonathan at what must have been Saul’s palace (verse 1). In Ramah, David is with Samuel the prophet. In Ramah, Saul cannot lay a hand on David. When Saul sends the three parties of men to arrest David, they are all divinely prohibited by the miraculous work of the Spirit of God. This happens to Saul as well (19:18-24). Why then does David “flee” to the place where Saul and Jonathan live? The only explanation that makes any sense to me is that this is where his beloved friend Jonathan can be found. David does not seem to be fleeing *from* Saul* as much as he is fleeing *to* Jonathan, much like he fled to Ahimelech and Samuel earlier.

Unless David is hypocritical in what he is saying to Jonathan, he is humbly taking the most praiseworthy position. He does not begin by accusing or attacking Saul. He begins by focusing on his own sin. Notice the two-fold reference to sin (“**iniquity**,” “**sin**”) in verse 1. David seems to be genuinely interested in knowing if he has done something wrong which has brought about the treatment Saul has been dishing out to him.

Initially, Jonathan is a couple of steps behind David. He does not respond to David’s inquiry about iniquity, but instead challenges David’s assessment that he is in grave danger – from Saul! Jonathan challenges David’s statement that Saul is seeking his life rather than his question concerning his own sin. Jonathan is a little nave here, for he assures David that if his father is intent on killing him, he would surely tell him – his son – about it first.

David strongly disagrees with Jonathan’s assessment of the situation. He takes a solemn vow to underscore just how serious he is about this. Let Jonathan not brush his concerns aside so quickly. Now that Saul knows David and Jonathan are friends, bound together by a covenant, why would he be so foolish as to reveal his plans to kill David to Jonathan? Saul has purposely kept his plans to kill David quiet so that Jonathan will not know what he is doing.

David then affirms, in the strongest possible words, the fact that his life is in grave danger. He is but a hair’s length away from death. Jonathan now realizes how serious David is and how strongly he feels about this danger. He understands that David desperately wants him to take him seriously, and so Jonathan relents, assuring David that he will do whatever he wants. Jonathan may not yet be convinced of his father’s evil intentions, but he is convinced that

David is both distressed and in fear of his life. Jonathan will take David at his word.

In verses 5 and following, David proposes a plan that will demonstrate Saul's intentions toward him. This seems to be as much for Jonathan's benefit as for David's. The plan is simple. The next day is the new moon, and thus a time for Saul to make a sacrifice and share a sacrificial meal. David is a part of Saul's household and thus expected to be present. If Saul does intend to kill David, he will be very upset to find that David is not present at this meal. If Saul has no plans to kill David, his absence should not be a problem to Saul. And so David plans to be absent, and by his absence to test Saul's intentions toward him.

David's absence will need to be explained in such a way that it appears reasonable for him to be absent. David has already worked out the explanation. Since Jonathan will be present at the celebration, he can make David's excuse for him. If and when Saul asks about David's absence, Jonathan can tell the king that David had asked him for permission to miss this celebration because he felt he should go to Bethlehem to be with his family for this celebration. It is a reasonable explanation, one that should not cause Saul any problems, unless indeed he is looking for an excuse himself – an excuse to kill David.

But why would David's absence be such a big deal to Saul? I take it that David has not eaten many meals at Saul's table recently. Twice already, Saul has attempted to kill David with his spear while he was in his house. David fled from Saul's household and even from his own house, ending up in Ramah with Samuel. For some period of time, David has been absent. This festive meal must be something like Christmas is for us, a family time when family members are expected to be present. It does not matter that David has his own family, and they might want him to be with them. Saul expects David to be with him, which provides him another opportunity to finish him off. If David does not attend this meal, Saul has no idea when his next opportunity to kill him might come. David's absence is therefore to be a test of Saul's intentions toward him.

David appeals to Jonathan to carry out this plan to see whether still Saul really intends to kill him. The basis for his appeal is the love these two men have for each other and the covenant they have already made (see 18:1-4; 19:1). David speaks to Jonathan as to his master, as though he were the servant (20:8). In fact, this is true. Jonathan is, at that moment, the son of the king, and David is his subordinate. David appeals to the covenant the two have already made with each other and asks Jonathan to carry out the plan he has proposed. Rather than turn David over to Saul, David requests that Jonathan execute him himself, if indeed he is guilty of sin. Jonathan is appalled at such a suggestion. Does David really think he would betray his friend by turning him over to his father to be killed? If

Jonathan were to learn of any plot against David by his father, does David suppose for a moment that his friend will not warn him rather than betray him?

Jonathan makes it very clear that he will warn David of any plot against him. If his father really intends to kill David, he can be assured that Jonathan will warn him. There is, however, a possibility the plan will backfire. Suppose King Saul does intend to kill David, and that he kills Jonathan for trying to learn what his intentions toward David are? If Saul kills Jonathan for trying to help David, who will warn David then? What I have spelled out more bluntly, David says much more delicately:

“Who will tell me if your father answers harshly?” (verse 10b).

At this point, Jonathan does something strange and quite unexpected. He says no more to him about this matter until they are standing out in the middle of *the* field (verse 12). This seems to be the field where Jonathan reasons with his father, as David looks on (19:1-6). I believe Jonathan is beginning to realize just how serious this situation has become. If Saul is insanely jealous, and scheming to put David to death, it is likely that someone overhearing the conversation between David and Jonathan might report it to Saul. The two of them are not going out into the field to get a breath of fresh air. They are going out into the field where curious eyes and finely tuned ears cannot discern what is being said between these two friends. Since this is also the place where Jonathan will communicate the outcome of the “test,” they are able to point to the places each person will take.

If the test shows that Saul has changed his mind about David, and his intentions are favorable, then Jonathan will send to David to make this known (verse 12). But if Saul’s intentions toward David are still hostile, then Jonathan will convey this news to David so that he can make his getaway. If this is the case, and David has to flee (as Jonathan now seems to fear), then let David know that he goes with Jonathan’s blessing and love (verse 13).

Now, if David must flee, Jonathan has a request of him, a request based upon the covenant these two have made with each other. If Jonathan survives this test,²⁸ then let David spare his life, just as he has sought to protect David’s life. Jonathan knows that David will survive and that he will become Israel’s king. When David becomes the King of Israel, Jonathan asks that David spare his life. He knows all too well that when one king replaces another, the prevailing king kills off any rivals for the throne, including their heirs. Jonathan wants David’s assurance that he and his descendants will not be annihilated, as is normally the case. The two men refine and reaffirm their covenant with each other, as a manifestation of their love. There is a very critical difference between this clarified, refined covenant and the one made earlier. The former was a covenant

between two men, David and Jonathan. This covenant is a covenant between two houses, two dynasties. This covenant between David's descendants and Jonathan's descendants.

A subtle change has taken place which can be clearly seen in verses 18-23. Jonathan has taken the lead in this whole matter. At first, it was all David's initiative. David fled from Ramah and sought out Jonathan. Jonathan is reluctant to believe what David is telling him about his father. Then, seeing how serious David is about this matter, he agrees to help him however David thinks is best. David proposes a plan that will reveal Saul's plans with respect to David. Then, in verse 11, Jonathan takes David out into the open field where they continue their conversation. I would argue that from this point on in our text, Jonathan has taken charge. He is no longer a reluctant hearer or a compliant assistant to David; he is the leader.*

In verses 18-23, Jonathan carefully spells out a plan by which he will convey the outcome of David's test to him. David is to hide out for three days while the test is being conducted. Then, at the end of this period, he is to come to the field where they are presently standing. There, Jonathan will signal the outcome of the test to him. Jonathan will shoot three arrows, as though aiming for a target. Then, Jonathan will send a servant boy to retrieve the arrows. If Jonathan directs the young lad to seek for the arrows in Jonathan's direction, then David should understand that Saul's intentions toward him are good, and thus he can come out of hiding. But if Jonathan directs the lad to seek the arrows beyond where the lad is, then David is to understand that Saul intends to harm him, and he should flee.

Once again, the covenant between David and Jonathan is mentioned in connection with this whole plan. Jonathan assures David that he will do all that he has promised, because of their covenant. The use of the term *forever* in verse 23 indicates that this covenant is now viewed as being between Jonathan and his descendants, and David and his descendants. This extended covenant is the basis for their mutual trust and their mutual kindness.

Saul Fails the Test

(20:24-34)

24 So David hid in the field; and when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. 25 And the king sat on his seat as usual, the seat by the wall; then Jonathan rose up and Abner sat down by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. 26 Nevertheless Saul did not speak anything that day, for he thought, "It is an accident, he is not clean, surely *he is* not clean. " 27 And it came about the next day, the second *day* of the new

moon, that David's place was empty; so Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" 28 Jonathan then answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me *to go* to Bethlehem, 29 for he said, 'Please let me go, since our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to attend. And now, if I have found favor in your sight, please let me get away that I may see my brothers.' For this reason he has not come to the king's table. " 30 Then Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? 31 "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die." 32 But Jonathan answered Saul his father and said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" 33 Then Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down; so Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death. 34 Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him.

The next day, Jonathan sits at the table with his father and others just as he always has. King Saul sits with his **"back to the wall"** (verse 25), which offers him greater security (no one can stab or shoot someone in the back this way). Jonathan gets up, and Abner sits beside the king. Everybody seems to be seated in their customary places. David's place at the table is conspicuously empty. Saul says nothing. He reasons to himself that David has somehow become unclean, so that he cannot partake of the meal.

The following day, David's place is still empty. With what may be a feigned casual manner, Saul asks Jonathan why **"the son of Jesse"** is not present the last two days. Jonathan gives Saul the excuse he and David have rehearsed. David, Jonathan replies, has asked permission of him to be absent so that he can celebrate with his family in Bethlehem. David's brother pressured him to attend, so he asked permission to be absent from Jonathan, and Jonathan granted it. It is as simple as that -- no big problem.

It most certainly is a problem to Saul! He goes into a rage, and his anger focuses on Jonathan. It is all Jonathan's fault, Saul concludes. He calls his own son a most offensive name. All of Saul's accusations are essentially true and based upon the covenant that Jonathan and David have made. Jonathan is Saul's first-born, the heir to his throne. Jonathan is throwing all this away by pledging his love and allegiance to David. If David lives, the throne will be his and not

Jonathan's. Because of this, Saul commands Jonathan to bring David to him to be killed.

Saul's reasons are self-serving and not at all godly. Saul avoids the fact that God indicated through Samuel that his kingdom would be taken away from him (13:13-14; 15:22-23). He sets aside the fact that Samuel has anointed David as Israel's next king (16:13). To kill David will be to kill God's anointed. While David would not do this to Saul, Saul most certainly intends to kill David. Jonathan presses his father to think in terms of biblical justice. If David is to be killed, just what sin is he to be executed for committing? What sin of David's deserves the death penalty? If there is no scriptural (i.e., the Law of Moses) reason for killing David, then Saul is the one who is sinning, not David.

Now Saul is really mad. He picks up his spear, always nearby, and hurls it at his own son Jonathan. Saul hurls his spear, and Jonathan gets the point. He is not hit. Fortunately Saul has gotten no better at hitting his target with a spear.* There is no longer any doubt in Jonathan's mind. Now there are two empty places at that table, David's and Jonathan's. How appropriate. Jonathan is deeply grieved. His grief, you will note, is not due to the humiliation his father has heaped upon him at the dinner table, but due to the way his father has dishonored David (verse 34). David has been right all along, dead right. Saul does intend to kill him, and he will also kill anyone who tries to stop him from doing so.

A Sad Farewell

(20:35-42)

35 Now it came about in the morning that Jonathan went out into the field for the appointment with David, and a little lad *was* with him. 36 And he said to his lad, "Run, find now the arrows which I am about to shoot." As the lad was running, he shot an arrow past him. 37 When the lad reached the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the lad, and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?" 38 And Jonathan called after the lad, "Hurry, be quick, do not stay!" And Jonathan's lad picked up the arrow and came to his master. 39 But the lad was not aware of anything; only Jonathan and David knew about the matter. 40 Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad and said to him, "Go, bring *them* to the city." 41 When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David more. 42 And Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.

It is now time for Jonathan to carry out their plan completely. He must convey to David that he was right, that Saul does intend to kill him. As agreed, Jonathan goes out to the field where he knows David is hiding and watching. He sends his young servant out into the field to retrieve his arrows. He shoots his first arrow past the young lad, and then calls out to him that the arrow is beyond him. Now David knows. Saul is trying to kill him. He must make his escape as quickly as possible. When the young lad brings the arrow back to him, Jonathan sends him back to the city.

If the plan is for David to escape unnoticed into the forest, it is not carried out. These two men know that from this point on their lives will never be the same. They may never see each other again, and if they do, it will only be in secret, and for a brief time. And so David comes out of hiding to approach Jonathan and bid him a tearful farewell. The two kiss and weep, David more than Jonathan. This is going to be a great loss to him, and he knows it. As they part, Jonathan speaks of the covenant he has made with David and his offspring and reaffirms his commitment to keep it. David arises and leaves, and Jonathan returns to the city. Things will never be the same again, and they both know it.

Conclusion

We can see that this chapter is a significant turning point in terms of David's relationship with Saul and with Jonathan. Previously, David has fled from Saul's presence, but this has always been temporary. Now, it is permanent. David will never again sit at Saul's table, never again play his harp to soothe the king's troubled spirit, never again fight for Saul in the Israelite army. David will become a fugitive who is constantly on the run from Saul who seeks to kill him. Because of this, the fellowship David has been able to enjoy with Jonathan will never be the same either. And so David and Jonathan say their sad farewells in our text. They will meet again, but it will not be often, or for long.

One word sums up what this chapter is all about, and that word is *covenant*. David flees to Jonathan, at a very desperate moment in his life, because they have a covenant relationship which assures David of Jonathan's love and support. This covenant of mutual love and good will is the reason Jonathan takes David so seriously that he is willing to carry out David's test. It is also why Jonathan takes such elaborate security precautions (going out into the field, communicating to David through a kind of signal). This covenant is actually clarified and extended in our text. What was originally a covenant between two men has now become a covenant between two families. What was once a vague, general covenant made at a time when there was no animosity on Saul's part toward David, now is clarified to deal with Saul's hostility and his intent to do violence to David. The covenant between Jonathan and David is also a good part

of Saul's anger toward both David and Jonathan. The covenant that bound these two men and their families incited Saul's wrath toward David and his son Jonathan. Saul could not oppose one without also opposing the other. .

This covenant between David and Jonathan is the basis and guiding principle of the relationship between these two men. It gives both a sense of security and expresses both men's submission and servanthood to each other. This is such an important matter that we should pause to reflect on it. We should first discuss this covenant as it bears upon our relationships with others. We will then conclude by exploring the way in which a "covenant" governs our relationship with God.

A Covenant Governs Our Relationship With Others

Even the land in which we live is governed on the basis of a covenant which men made with one another. The Declaration of Independence was penned, in part, because the people of this nation felt England had broken their covenant with those they governed. Our Constitution is a kind of covenant, which binds us together as a nation. Whether written or oral, implied or stated, government is based upon a covenant made by men.

I believe marriage is one of the most important covenants a man can make with a woman. It is still popular for some who live together without being married to say: "We love each other, so we don't need a piece of paper to keep us together." Our text makes it very clear that a covenant is the outgrowth of love, an expression of love. David and Jonathan made a covenant with each because they loved each other. In their minds, it would have been inconceivable for them not to enter into a covenant. Why would two men, who love each other as brothers, not be willing to make commitments that they vow to keep forever?

A covenant is proof of love. A covenant is a mutually agreed upon definition of how love will be reflected in a relationship. I think it is also safe to say that a covenant relationship grows. As Saul's jealousy of David becomes apparent, both David and Jonathan modify (or clarify) their covenant to take these new circumstances into account. But their commitments to each other do not diminish because hard times come upon their relationship; hard times prompt these two men to further commit themselves to each other.⁹¹ The same thing applies to marriage vows. When a man and a woman come together to become husband and wife, they express vows which are really the definition of a covenant that is being made. This covenant is not to be broken. This covenant is the foundation and mainstay when troubles come, even when love seems to be lacking. A covenant gives stability to a marriage that romantic feelings cannot provide, because they are not constant.

For all believers in Jesus Christ, there is not only a covenant between the individual believer and Christ, there is also a covenant relationship between all believers. We become a covenant community, bound together by a covenant. Notice how the prophet Malachi rebukes the Israelites of old for failing to keep their covenants:

10 “Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? 11 “Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 “As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob *everyone* who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts. 13 “And this is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favour from your hand. 14 “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 “But not one has done *so* who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did *that* one *do* while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 16 “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously” (Malachi 2:10-16, emphasis mine).

A Covenant Governs Our Relationship With God

What I have said about covenants governing the relationships men have with one another is the outgrowth of a higher truth: God governs man’s relationship with Him by means of a covenant. When God destroyed all mankind, because of their sin, He established a covenant with Noah and his descendants. When God entered into a relationship with Abram (soon to be name Abraham), He did so by means of a covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3, etc.). When God delivered the nation Israel from the bondage in Egypt, He entered into a new relationship with them, and this relationship was governed by the Mosaic Covenant. God’s actions toward Israel in the Old Testament can be seen as the outworking of this covenant. God acted in accordance with His covenant.

All of God’s dealings with men can be seen as the outworking of His covenant with them. But while God has always kept His covenant commitments, man has consistently demonstrated that he is a covenant-breaker. If our salvation

depended upon our keeping of God's covenants, we would never be forgiven of our sins and enter into the Kingdom of God. God knew that while men promised to keep His Mosaic Covenant, they would never do it:

28 "And the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. 29 'Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!' (Deuteronomy 5:28-29).

Later on in Israel's history, when Joshua spoke his parting words to the Israelites, they once again promised to keep this (Mosaic) covenant. Joshua knew better:

19 Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. 20 "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you." 21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." 22 And Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses." 23 "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." 24 And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice." 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem (Joshua 24:19-25).

There was only one solution. There must be a salvation which did not depend upon man's perfection and performance. There must be a salvation which depended upon God's perfection and performance. And so it was in the Old Testament that God began to speak of a "**new covenant**" He would make with men which would result in eternal salvation:

31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbour and

each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

This "**new covenant**" was brought about by the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

19 And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:19-20).

4 And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, 8 how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. 10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses *it*. 11 For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory (2 Corinthians 3:4-11).

11 But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:11-15; see all of chapter 8 as well).

It all comes down to this. God has always dealt with men in terms of a covenant. In every case, men have failed to keep God's covenant, even though God has faithfully kept His covenant commitments and promises. In order to save men from their sins and give them entrance into His kingdom, God has set aside the old covenant(s) for a new and better one. This covenant is not dependent upon our performance, but on God's. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to live a sinless life, to perfectly fulfil the old, Mosaic Covenant. And then, when He died on the cross of Calvary, He bore the penalty for man's sins. When He rose from the dead, He demonstrated God's satisfaction, and His (Christ's) righteousness. *By Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, God provided men with a new covenant, whereby man could be assured of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In order to be saved, we need only embrace this covenant as our only hope and provision for salvation.* This covenant has been secured, once for all. It cannot be set aside or nullified. It needs only to be embraced as one's own. By acknowledging our inability to please God by our own efforts, and by trusting in the work Christ has done on our behalf, we enter into this new covenant and all of its benefits. Have you entered into this covenant? I urge you to do so today. What a great God we have, who has offered us this covenant relationship with Him.

21. David's flight to Nob and to Gath

Verses 1-9. David at Nob

Verses 10-15. David at Gath

1 Samuel 21:1-22:4

Borrowed Bread

(21:1-9)

1 Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David, and said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" 2 And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commissioned me with a matter, and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.' 3 "Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found." 4 And the priest answered David and said, "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women." 5 And David answered the priest and said to him, "Surely women have been kept from

us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels *be holy*?" 6 So the priest gave him consecrated *bread*; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* when it was taken away. 7 Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds. 8 And David said to Ahimelech, "Now is there not a spear or a sword on hand? For I brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's matter was urgent." 9 Then the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take *it*. For there is no other except it here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

Where could David possibly go for refuge or even help? Surely Ahimelech the high priest can be trusted. And so David flees to Nob, the city of the priests, a few miles to the north and east of Jerusalem (a few miles south of Gibeah, Saul's hometown). David is well aware of Saul's influence and his potential for violence. So he keeps his true purpose for coming a secret, perhaps thinking he is doing the priest a favour. It does not turn out that way, as we shall see.

Ahimelech is no one's fool either. When he sees David, he comes trembling to meet him (compare 16:1-5). He is especially troubled to see David coming alone and questions him about this. David has been made the commander of a thousand by Saul. If he is coming in an official capacity (as he has a number of times in the past – see 22:15), then he should be with his men. "Where are they?" the priest wonders. He asks David about his coming alone.

David has a ready-made story for the priest. I do not know whether or not the priest believes it, but he does know better than to press David on this point. He takes David's words at face value. David believes that if he keeps Ahimelech ignorant, Saul will surely not harm him. David is wrong. David tells the priest he is on special assignment for King Saul, that the king has sent him on a top-secret mission, one he cannot even describe to Ahimelech. David tells Ahimelech he is not alone; his men are secretly hidden a short distance away. All of this cloak and dagger stuff adds importance to the mission, or at least David hopes it does.

David now comes to the reason for his visit: he needs some provisions. Carrying on with his deception, he tells Ahimelech that he needs some bread. The only bread the priest has on hand is sacred bread, the showbread, which is normally eaten only by the priests. If David and his men have not been rendered

ceremonially unclean by sexual relations with women,” the priest will give five loaves of the consecrated bread to David. David assures him that this is the case. If, in normal circumstances this was always the case, how much more so in this instance. The priest gives David the sacred bread, but as he does so, Doeg the Edomite looks on with great interest. Doeg is the “chief of Saul’s shepherds,” a job David could handle very well. It will not be long before Doeg reports what he has seen to Saul, bringing death to almost every soul in the city of Nob (see 22:6-23).

David now asks Ahimelech for a sword. Few swords could be found in the entire kingdom, much less in the camp of the priests. What need had they for weapons? There was but one sword on the premises, the sword of Goliath, the sword David had obtained by his victory over this Philistine giant. The sword was a kind of trophy, a memorial of the victory God gave Israel through David. In truth, it belongs to David anyway, so the priest willingly gives it to him, no doubt wondering why David came so ill prepared for battle. David gives the excuse that he was in such a hurry he didn’t have time to get his sword or other weapons. This must have produced a puzzled look on the priest’s face, as David’s story becomes harder and harder to believe. Nevertheless, he gives David Goliath’s sword, and it appears David promptly leaves for Gath.

So It hasCome to This

or

Seeking to Make an Ally of Achish (21:10-15)

10 Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, “Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, ‘Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands?’” 12 And David took these words to heart, and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. 13 So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanelly in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, “Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? 15 “Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?”

As a teacher of the Scriptures, I have conducted a good many seminars inside prison walls. There is always the possibility of trouble. Occasionally, I pondered the question of what I would do if some kind of riot broke out while I was inside the prison walls. In a number of cases, I would have chosen to be on the inside of those bars, with believing inmates, rather than on the outside with unbelieving

guards. My prison seminars help me understand these incredible closing verses in 1 Samuel 21.

It is truly amazing what David does here. David flees from Israel to the land of the Philistines. He leaves the people of God for the enemies of God. He seeks refuge from King Achish with whom he has done battle before. David has been to Gath before – well, almost. After he killed Goliath, the Philistine champion, David and the Israelites pursued the Philistines, killing them right up to the cities of Gath and Ekron (1 Samuel 17:51-52). Now, David approaches Gath again, but this time as a political refugee seeking asylum from Achish.

David comes to Gath seeking protection and sanctuary, but this is the hometown of Goliath (17:23) whom he killed. To make matters worse, David is carrying Goliath's sword (verses 8-9). I would think David must be crazy to come to Gath, even more so than his conduct at Gath (verse 13). If these verses tell us anything, it is how intent Saul is on killing David. If David is forced to seek sanctuary among his enemies, what does this tell us about his "friend," Saul? This is but another confirmation of the hostility (even insanity) of Saul. Things are desperate indeed!

The author of this account is not nearly as interested in telling us about David's arrival at Gath as in describing his departure. Whatever David's reasons for going to Gath, it is quite obvious that God does not want him there. God uses the servants of Achish to pressure this Philistine king to take David as a serious threat to Philistine security. Both here and in chapters 27-29, Achish is presented as less than astute and gullible. Somehow, he takes a liking to David. He seems overly confident of David's submission to him and of his value as an ally. He does not willingly entertain thoughts that David may still be a loyal Israelite, soon to take the throne over Israel.

It was not unusual for kings to take in political refugees from nearby nations (see, for example, 1 Kings 11:40; 2 Kings 25:27-30). If they were given sanctuary, they might become grateful allies, if not loyal subjects. These refugees are a kind of trophy, a living testimony to the military dominance and power of the host nation. Achish is brought back to reality by his servants. Does the king not remember that David was designated as Israel's next king? Does he not remember Goliath's death and their defeat by Israel under David's leadership? Has he forgotten the song sung about David, proclaiming him to be greater than Saul:

"Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands"

Achish is forced to think through his offer to give David sanctuary in Gath. While he is thinking about this, David is thinking too. He has heard of the

counsel the king's servants gave to Achish. He knows that if their advice is taken, he might be put to death. He is in trouble, a lot of trouble. How can David get out of this predicament with his life?

It turns out there is a way. David does escape with his life, but not with his dignity. If he arrives as a dreaded warrior, greater even than Goliath, he leaves as a lunatic. David somehow lands on the idea of acting insane. If he can convince the king that he has lost his sanity, he will no longer be taken seriously, and he might even be allowed to live. So David begins to carry out his plan. He scribbles on the doors of the city gate and lets the saliva run down his face and in his beard. He is disgusting and pathetic.

If his act convinces no one else, it convinces the king. Achish really does not want to kill David anyway. He seems to genuinely like him. This is his way out. The king needs not take a madman seriously! There is no glory in killing David. There is no benefit to keeping him in Gath. Gath is not a mental asylum! They have enough crazy Philistines in town; they do not need an Israelite madman as well. And so Achish has David run out of town. David's life is spared, and the concerns of the advisors of the king are dealt with. This, so it seems, is a win-win situation.

22. David at Adullam; Saul's vengeance

Verses 1-5. David gains followers

Verses 6-23. Saul's desperate violence

David Becomes a Cave Dweller and a Captain

(22:1-2)

1 So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father's household heard *of it*, they went down there to him. 2 And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.

David makes his way back into the territory of Judah, but not too far from Israel's border with Philistia. He hides away in the cave of Adullam. The location of Adullam is not certain, but it seems to have been located several miles or so east of Gath toward Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It appears David has

found a safe, secluded hideout just far enough away from Gath and not too close to Saul.

Up until now, David seems to be alone. But when he hides out at the cave of Adullam, a number of people begin to arrive hoping to associate with David. The first to hear of David's whereabouts seem to be his family, who join him at the cave. They must sense that once David is regarded as Saul's enemy, they are not safe either. This seems to be a safe assumption, based upon the fate of the priests (see chapter 22). Others follow, those in distress, in debt, or out of favor with Saul. They come to David as their new leader. One wonders, do these men, like our Lord's disciples, hope for a new king and a new kingdom which will overthrow the old? During his stay at the cave, those joining with David come to number around 400.

To Moab and Back

(22:3-5)

3 And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come *and stay* with you until I know what God will do for me." 4 Then he left them with the king of Moab; and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. 5 And the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

The cave outgrown, or David's whereabouts too well known, David moves on to Mizpah of Moab to seek a place of refuge for his elderly parents (see 1 Samuel 17:12). They are not safe in Bethlehem, because Saul can too easily get to them and thus to David through them. Neither are they able to keep up the pace David and the others have to maintain, quickly moving from one deserted, remote place to another. They are not cut out for the life of a fugitive. So David seeks a place of refuge for them in Moab. You may remember that Ruth, David's great-grandmother, was a Moabite woman (see Ruth 1:4; 4:13-17). This may incline the King of Moab to grant David's request. This seems to put David's parents out of harm's way during the years he flees from Saul.

While David is hiding in the stronghold in Moab, prophet Gad comes to David with a word from God. David is not to continue to hide out in the stronghold. He must leave there and return to the land of Judah.* David obeys the command of the prophet, although he may wonder why he is told to return to Judah rather than remain in Moab. By the time we reach chapter 26, David will know why and will tell us (and Saul). David returns to Judah, hiding out in the forest of Hareth, a kind of ancient Robin Hood.

Conclusion

One thing that is quite apparent in this passage of Scripture is the truth of the words written by the apostle James in the New Testament:

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months (James 5:17).

Many like to think of David as a real *man*. I believe our text portrays him as a *real* man. He does not always think or do the spiritual thing. He has a heart for God, but he also has feet of clay. David seeks refuge from Ahimelech, yet admits that he knows better. He admits that he is to blame for the deaths of the priests and their families (22:22). He flees to Philistia, looking to his enemies for sanctuary, rather than to God. He then flees to Moab, where a prophet must tell him to go home. David does not do everything right. He is a *real* man, not a caricature, and not a mythical creation of some author's mind. It is often because of David's failures that we are encouraged and given hope, for he was a man "with a nature like ours." God deals graciously with us as He did with David.

One could quite easily pass over the events of our text without taking a second look. To the untrained eye, it looks like David has very good luck, at least twice in our text. First, David manages to escape to Nob where there is no bread except that reserved for the priests. Ahimelech makes an exception and gives David some of this bread. Second, David "escapes" to the land of the Philistines, bearing Goliath's sword, and finding himself at this giant's hometown. He seems marked for death, but his feigned insanity gets him an escort out of town. How lucky can a guy get?

David's Deliverance and David's Psalms

Other texts of Scripture make it very clear that this is not "good luck," nor is David's deliverance the result of his cunning. This is a divine deliverance. In fact, we shall soon see (chapter 22) that while David escapes from Nob to Gath, the priests and their families are not so fortunate. The veil is lifted for us in the Psalms. The historical backdrop of Psalm 52 is Doeg's report to Saul that he has seen David at Nob. Psalms 34 and 56 are written during David's time at Gath. Psalms 57 and 142 are written while David hides out in the cave. These psalms are David's reflections and considered conclusions about what *really* happened in our text. Let us pause to briefly reflect on some of the lessons the Psalms point out to us.

(1) Deliverance is Divine.

God is the One who saves. Consequently, He is the One to whom we must cry for deliverance (34:4-7; 57:1-3; 142). He is also the One whom we must praise for delivering us. *It may not always look as though God is the one doing the delivering, but all deliverance is from Him.* On the surface, one would not see God as David's Deliverer when He spares him at Gath, but Psalm 34 makes it very clear that David's deliverance is from the Lord.

(2) God is our Deliverer from those who seek our destruction (56:1-7; 57:4-6).

David sees his destruction as purposed by wicked men and God as the One who delivers men from the hands of the wicked.

(3) Divine deliverance is given to those who love and trust God, and who call upon Him for salvation (56:3-4, 9-11; 57:1-3; 142:1-2).

God cares for, and thus protects, His loved ones, those who seek refuge in Him. He delivers those who fear Him and who call upon Him for salvation.

(4) God's deliverance is undeserved; it is a gift of His grace (57:1).

Divine deliverance is not granted because men merit it, but because God is gracious and merciful. He is moved with compassion by our afflictions (34:17-18; 56:8). His deliverance often comes from the consequences of our own foolishness and sin.

(5) God delivers men in order to bring about thanksgiving, praise, and glory to Himself (Psalm 56:12; 57:5, 8, 9, 11; 142:7).

When God delivers men from their afflictions, they are expected to publicly thank and praise Him for His goodness, and thus to publicly glorify Him. In this way, our divinely-wrought deliverance is not just for our good, but for God's glory.

(6) God also delivers men so they may learn more of Him, and then instruct others from what they have learned (34:8-14).

I believe David writes about the fear of the Lord in Psalm 34 because he has learned a great deal about fear. David is first afraid of men. This appears to be his reason for fleeing to Gath. He fears Saul. Then, he seems to fear the Philistines. David learns that *God casts our fears aside, and in the process, we learn to fear God rather than men.* This fear of God teaches us to **“keep our tongue from evil, and our lips from speaking guile”** (34:13). I believe David recognizes the importance of telling the truth, and when he comes to fear God

more than men, he speaks the truth and urges others to do likewise. David's deliverance enables him to instruct others from what he has learned.

(7) God delivers, even when it appears the deliverance is wrought by other means (34).

Who would even think that David's acting insane and his expulsion from Gath is from the hand of God? Is it not good luck, or skillful acting, on David's part? Not in David's mind! It is God who delivers David from Gath, even if the means He employs is David's feigned insanity. (Was it not God who first planted the idea of feigning insanity in David's mind?)

(8) God works though means that appear normal and, perhaps, even disgustingly human (34).

Have you ever watched a movie that sought to portray some spiritual or religious theme? Even when I am away from the television, listening only to the sound, I can tell when a "spiritual" scene is taking place. There is almost always a background of "heavenly music." I don't know how to describe it, but it is music with an auditory halo. It is music we have come to associate as spiritual or heavenly (usually violins or harps are employed for the desired effect).

Do you remember seeing the sign placed along the highway before you come to a road repair or construction site? It reads, "*Slow, Men Working.*" I think this is the way many Christians expect God to act. When God is delivering someone in the Bible, we expect to see a sign which reads, in effect: "*Slow, God Working.*" We want to hear some form of "heavenly music" playing in the background, or something which tells us that God is present. But such trappings are not evident at the time that Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery. They are not evident, to Job at least, when Satan makes his life miserable. Neither are they evident when David is drooling and doodling in Gath. But God is at work, even when it is not apparent to our eyes. Later on in the Book of 2 Samuel, we will see that Solomon becomes the heir to his father's (David's) throne, even though he is born to Bathsheba, the woman who is Uriah's wife. The temple will be built on ground that David purchased because he wilfully numbered the people of Israel, knowing it was wrong. It was at the threshing floor of Arunah, the Jebusite, that David offered a sacrifice to God when the plague was halted by God (2 Samuel 24). God is at work where we would never expect to see His hand.

(9) God's deliverance is often brought about in the midst of circumstances which make escape seem impossible (142:4).

God delights to let us get into impossible situations, so that when He saves us, it is very clear that it was entirely of Him. In his psalms, David paints a very bleak picture of his condition, and then goes on to describe the way God rescues him.

10. God delivers us in ways that are not flattering, but humbling.

Occasionally film footage on the television news shows the rescue of someone in a most unflattering way. It may be a woman, whose hair is a mess, whose face is dirty, and whose clothing is deplorable. No one likes to be rescued in this way, or in this condition, but when given the choice of being rescued in a humbling way or not being rescued at all, the decision is rather obvious. God rescues David in a way that humbles him greatly. God is not out to bolster David's ego; He is out to save David in a way that humbles him and causes him to turn to Him for deliverance. It is strange but true that God often has to humble us first, so that we will see how desperate our circumstances are, so that we will humbly cry out to Him for deliverance.

As I think through the Bible, I realize how often God "saves" or delivers His own from destruction, but in very humbling ways. I think of Abram, who fled to Egypt for "deliverance" during a time of famine. In doing so, he put not only his own life at risk, but the promise of God that he and Sarai would have a child, through whom blessings would come on Abram and the whole world (see Genesis 12:1-3 ff.). Abram lied about Sarai, representing her as his sister rather than his wife, and as a result, she was taken into Pharaoh's harem. God delivered Abram and Sarai, but in a way that was humbling. Pharaoh ran them out of his land, giving them what appears to be an armed escort out of town (see Genesis 12:17-20).

One of the most humbling deliverances (other than David's, in our text) is that of Naaman. You may remember that Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, was also a leper. Through his Israelite slave girl, Naaman learns there is a prophet in Israel who can heal him. But when he arrives at the prophet's door, the prophet does not greet him personally, but sends his servant who instructs Naaman to bathe himself seven times in the Jordan river. Naaman is furious, because he is not treated as a dignitary. Finally, after receiving wise counsel from his servant, the Syrian commander obeys and is delivered from his malady. God saves him, but in a way that humbles him (see 2 Kings 5).

11. God's deliverance is more than temporal, more than just physical; God's deliverance includes His deliverance from eternal condemnation (34:21-22; 56:13).

It is interesting that in the New Testament the word that is very often rendered "saved" is used more broadly than just of spiritual salvation. It is used of

physical healing and other acts of deliverance. In our text, God saves David's life, but in his psalms David informs the reader that this temporal salvation is a prototype of the eternal salvation which God also accomplishes. The God who saves us from our afflictions and from our enemies, is the same God who saves us from His eternal wrath.

David's Deliverance and Our Lord Jesus Christ

David's deliverance has very direct ties to the New Testament, and particularly to our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider our Lord's use of our text in Matthew 12:

1 At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads *of grain* and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:1-8).

The Pharisees are especially distressed by what they consider violations of the Sabbath by our Lord and His disciples. When the disciples (not Jesus, you will note) pluck a few heads of grain and eat them on the Sabbath, the Pharisees see this as a flagrant violation of the law regarding the Sabbath. After all, this is work, they reason. And so they make a point of confronting Jesus with this example of His disregard for the Sabbath.

Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees. In effect, they persist to ask Him, "Just who do you think *you* are?" "How dare Jesus break the Sabbath by healing some and allowing His disciples to "harvest" grain on this sacred day!" Jesus responds to this Sabbath challenge several different ways. He shows His opponents to be hypocrites, because they do not keep the Sabbath as they require of Him (they will work to get one of their oxen out of the ditch). Neither is it wrong to do good on the Sabbath. They fail to grasp that the Sabbath was created for man's benefit, not man for the Sabbath's. Another answer is that Jesus works on the Sabbath to imitate His Father, who is also at work, saving men.

But here Jesus takes a very different approach. Jesus turns back to our text, reminding His opponents that David ate of the sacred bread, and yet he was not

one of the priests. How is it they are not upset over this? The answer, Jesus suggests, is that *who you are makes all the difference in the world*. They do not protest David's eating of the sacred bread because he is David. He is soon to become the King of Israel. This put the whole matter in an entirely different light. The same is true for the temple priests. They "work" on the Sabbath, but are not condemned for it, and rightly so, for they are priests.

One reason Jesus does not feel obliged to follow the Pharisees rules regarding the Sabbath is that He is the Son of God. He is God's Messiah, the One whom God has appointed to rule over the entire earth as King. If David can eat the sacred bread because of who he is, and if the priests can break the Sabbath because of who they are, then surely our Lord should not be challenged in the manner in which the Pharisees are doing. Who you are makes all the difference in the world. This principle is illustrated in our text, as our Lord indicates.

Who you are does make all the difference in the world. Without Christ, we are aliens and strangers to the kingdom of God. We are God's enemies. We are sinners, rightly condemned to death and eternal condemnation. In Christ, we are forgiven, cleansed, righteous, and destined to eternal life. David is delivered many times in his life. David's deliverance in our text is most humbling indeed. It is not the way he would have preferred to be rescued, but he is delivered from death and from his enemies. It is a humbling deliverance, but it is divine. For this, David gives God the glory.

Like David, we are those condemned to death. Apart from divine grace, we are as good as dead. Our problem is our own sin, which makes us unacceptable in God's sight. It brings us under divine condemnation and eternal damnation. God in His mercy and grace has provided a way of escape. God's means of deliverance is not flattering to us, but it is ever so glorifying to Him. He sent His only Son, to come to the earth as a man (a perfect God-man), to live a perfect life, and to die an innocent death as the payment for our sins. The cross was not an ego-inflating event. It was an ugly death our Lord died on behalf of guilty sinners. But God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, glorifying Him and those who, by faith, are in Him. *It is by faith in Jesus Christ that unworthy sinners are delivered from eternal death, to the glory of God.* Have you received this forgiveness of sins, this gift of God's righteousness in Jesus Christ? All you must do is to acknowledge your sin and trust in Jesus Christ as God's only means for your deliverance. I urge you to do so today.

1 Samuel 22:5-23:14

A Prophetic Directive

(22:5-10)

5 And the prophet Gad said to David, “Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.” So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

It appears that when David goes to Ahimelech the high priest one of his intentions is to obtain divine guidance. At least this is what Doeg reports to Saul, and Ahimelech seems to confirm this fact to Saul (22:10, 15). Since David conceals the fact that he is fleeing from Saul, one does not know what guidance he received from Ahimelech. But we do know that after this, David flees the country. He goes first to Gath, from which he is expelled for acting like a madman (21:10-15), then to the cave of Adullam (22:1-2), and then on to Moab (22:3-4), where he leaves his father and mother, and perhaps hides out himself in the *stronghold*.⁹⁵

Like Melchizedek in Genesis 14, the prophet Gad appears from out of nowhere and instructs David not to stay in the stronghold but to go into the land of Judah. If I understand him correctly, he tells David to stop hiding outside the land of Israel. David is to find his sanctuary in Israel, specifically in the territory of his own tribe, Judah. It is Judah, after all, who first accepts David as their king (2 Samuel 2:4). David obeys, making his hideout in the forest of Hereth. The exact whereabouts of this forest are not entirely clear, but from reading 2 Samuel 18:8, it is a dangerous place, one which Saul and his men will be reluctant to enter. This forest seems to be to David and his men what Sherwood Forest was to Robin Hood and his men.

Saul Lacks Intelligence⁹⁵ and Gains it from Doeg the Edomite

(22:6-10)

6 Then Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered. Now Saul was sitting in Gibeah, under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. 7 And Saul said to his servants who stood around him, “Hear now, O Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse also give to all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? 8 “For all of you have conspired against me so that there is no one who discloses to me when my son makes *a covenant* with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you who is sorry for me or

discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me to lie in ambush, as *it is* this day.” 9 Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing by the servants of Saul, answered and said, “I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. 10 “And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

Saul now seems to think the whole world is against him and for David. The term *conspired* appears twice in our text (in verses 8 and 13). Saul comes across in verses 6-10 as a kind of Rodney Dangerfield, who moans and groans that he gets “no respect.” He accuses virtually everyone of being part of a sinister plot against him, when in reality God is the one taking his kingdom from him, due to his own sin (see 13:8-14; 15:1-31). As a result of the guilt Saul heaps upon his servants, Doeg will inform Saul of David’s visit to Ahimelech and Ahimelech’s innocent compliance with David’s requests.

It is no surprise that Saul accuses David of conspiring against him. That is, after all, what Saul thinks. But he is wrong in accusing David of conspiracy. David is not “lying in ambush” as Saul charges (22:8, 13), waiting for the opportune moment to end Saul’s life. David is hiding out, seeking to avoid Saul and to escape from Saul’s schemes to put him to death.

What is amazing in these verses are the accusations Saul makes against his own son, Jonathan. Because of the covenant David made with Jonathan, we would not be surprised to read that Saul accuses his son of being taken in by David, of being recruited by David to join him in his conspiracy against Saul. But Saul accuses Jonathan of leading David astray, of stirring up David against him (22:8). This is a most amazing charge. The “conspiracy” against Saul, if traced to its roots, originated with Jonathan and not with David. Saul has lost it.

But the conspiracy theory goes even further. Not only does Saul accuse Jonathan and David of conspiring against him, he also accuses his servants – all of them! Saul is surrounded by his servants as he sits under the tamarisk tree near his home in Gibeah (verse 6). He begins by reminding his servants about the nature of politics and the spoils of political victory and power. As a reward for their loyalty to Saul, these Benjamites have been given property and positions of authority as political spoils. Do they think that if David becomes king they will enjoy the same spoils? They most certainly will not. And so Saul reminds his servants that they owe him -- big time. And now he wants a payback -- by having them inform him of David’s whereabouts. Saul tells his servants that by keeping silent about David and withholding any information about him and his whereabouts, they are joining David in his conspiracy against Saul. Doeg the

Edomite finds this ample reason to pass on to Saul what he observed while at Nob.

Doeg has just recently seen David. While at Nob, he saw David arrive and have dealings with the high priest, Ahimelech. The high priest inquired of the Lord for David and also gave him some of the sacred bread and the sword of Goliath, which he had been keeping. All of these things are true, but what Doeg does not tell Saul (perhaps he does not know) is that David never informed Ahimelech that he was fleeing from Saul. He never disclosed to the high priest anything that would make him a conspirator against Saul. But Saul is not interested in learning the truth. He is only blindly jealous and intent upon getting rid of anyone whom he wrongly perceives to be a threat to his throne.

The Massacre at Nob

(22:11-23)

11 Then the king sent someone to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's household, the priests who were in Nob; and all of them came to the king. 12 And Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." 13 Saul then said to him, "Why have you and the son of Jesse conspired against me, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise up against me by lying in ambush as *it is* this day?" 14 Then Ahimelech answered the king and said, "And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, even the king's son-in-law, who is captain over your guard, and is honored in your house? 15 "Did I *just* begin to inquire of God for him today? Far be it from me! Do not let the king impute anything to his servant *or* to any of the household of my father, for your servant knows nothing at all of this whole affair." 16 But the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's household!" 17 And the king said to the guards who were attending him, "Turn around and put the priests of the LORD to death, because their hand also is with David and because they knew that he was fleeing and did not reveal it to me." But the servants of the king were not willing to put forth their hands to attack the priests of the LORD. 18 Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn around and attack the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. 19 And he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep, *he struck* with the edge of the sword. 20 But one son of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. 21 And Abiathar told David that Saul had

killed the priests of the LORD. 22 Then David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about *the death* of every person in your father's household. 23 “Stay with me, do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life; for you are safe with me.”

After Saul browbeats his servants, Doeg discloses that David has gone to Ahimelech the high priest, who inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him sacred bread and the sword of Goliath. Saul has heard all he thinks he needs to know. In his mind, not only Ahimelech but all of the priesthood are part of the “conspiracy” against him. Ahimelech and the priests are all summoned to appear before Saul. I doubt that you and I can even fathom the ominous mood of this meeting. We live in a country where the President of the United States can be questioned, opposed, and even removed from his office. When he speaks, his opponents can boo him without fear for their lives. This is not so in the court of King Saul.

I recently read an article which described the terror that Joseph Stalin skillfully produced in the hearts of his ministers:

Stalin's dinners in the Kremlin went on all night. He would sit at a long table and force his ministers and cronies to drink, hour after hour, while he plotted and probed and flattered and terrified them. At dawn, when their brains were numb with fear and vodka and confusion, the NKVD might lead one or two of the men away, without explanation, to be shot. That was the physics of paranoia under laboratory conditions: for every action, an opposite (if, in the Kremlin, somewhat unequal) reaction. Paranoia induces paranoia. Stalin refracted violent fear through alcohol, then presided over a reciprocal mind game that ended in death.*

It is one thing to have a mad man in office, whom you can restrain and even remove. It is another to have a mad man who is a dictator like Stalin, or Nero, or Hitler. Such men hold absolute power. They can do whatever they please, even if it is irrational and insane, and there is no one to stop them. So it is with Saul. Saul is now a madman with no one to stop him. Does Saul rave about David and Jonathan, and even his servants being conspirators? Who is there to correct him? This madman now has an audience with the entire priesthood. On this occasion, it is not they who are to pass judgment on Saul but Saul who passes judgment on them. One can only attempt to appreciate the mood of terror, that ominous sense of dread, which all who stand before Saul must feel on this occasion.

Saul reveals his disdain for both David and Ahimelech by the way he addresses them. He calls them by their father's names: **“the son of Jesse”** (verse 8) and **“the son of Ahitub”** (verse 12). In his sin of offering the sacrifices described in

chapter 13, Saul makes himself equal to Samuel. In his dealings with Ahimelech and the priests here, Saul makes himself superior to them. He does not seek the facts of the case, but hastens to condemn the priests as traitors to the throne. He does not ask *if* Ahimelech has betrayed him, but *why* (verse 13).

Ahimelech responds with remarkable poise. He does not take this opportunity to cast blame on David for deceiving him, which in fact David did. Instead, Ahimelech stands up to Saul, speaking on David's behalf, and reminding the king that David is not only his most faithful servant but the man whom the people honour, and whom Saul has promoted to positions of power and authority. If all else fails, Saul should at least remember that David is his son-in-law (verse 14).

14 Ahimelech also speaks in his own defence, and on behalf of all the priests whom Saul has summoned.

Ahimelech did assist David, by inquiring of the Lord for him, by giving him some of the sacred bread, and by giving him the sword of Goliath. He did not knowingly assist David in any act of conspiracy. And the fact that he assisted David is nothing new or novel, let alone inappropriate. It is certainly not the first time David has come to him, asking him to inquire of the Lord. We can infer from this that David frequently sought divine guidance as he commenced a mission for the king. Saul should not see this visit of David, or Ahimelech's ministry to him, as anything out of the ordinary or out of bounds.⁹⁷

Ahimelech is right, and Saul is furious. The king pronounces the death sentence, not just upon Ahimelech but upon all the priests who have gathered. It seems that this is Saul's intention from the outset. Saul orders the guards standing by to put the priests to death. As much as these men fear Saul, they are not willing to put the priests to death. This must be a very painful period of silence, when every man freezes in place, unwilling to carry out Saul's order.⁹⁸

But Saul will not be thwarted. He turns to Doeg the Edomite and orders him to slay the priests, which he does. Saul will now kill the "king of the Jews" (David) and any who support him (like the priests), and he will enlist the help of Gentiles if need be to do so. Doeg kills 85 priests that day, but this is not enough for Saul. He then goes to Nob, the city of the priests, and proceeds to annihilate the families and even the cattle of these priests. How amazing! Saul, the man who was not so zealous in killing the Amalekites, even though ordered to do so by God, is now zealous in killing the priests and their cattle, even though forbidden to do so by God. How low can Saul sink?

Only one priest, Abiathar, survives and he flees to David to tell him what Saul has done to the other priests. David assumes full responsibility, admitting that he

had seen Doeg when he was at Nob, and that he knew this man would likely report on David's visit to Saul. There is nothing that David can do for those who have been slain, but he does offer sanctuary to Abiathar.

23. David delivers Keilah

Verses 1-15. David delivers Keilah

Verses 16-29. David is hunted by Saul

David Rescues Keilah

(23:1-14)

1 Then they told David, saying, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and are plundering the threshing floors." 2 So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and deliver Keilah." 3 But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?" 4 Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." 5 So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines; and he led away their livestock and struck them with a great slaughter. Thus David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah. 6 Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, *that* he came down *with* an ephod in his hand. 7 When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars." 8 So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. 9 Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." 10 Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Thy servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. 11 "Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Thy servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Thy servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." 12 Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you." 13 Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit. 14 And David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in

the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.

David's servants bring him word that Keilah is under attack by the Philistines. Actually it is King Saul's responsibility to deal with the Philistines (1 Samuel 9:16), but he is more interested in killing Israelites than dealing with the Philistine invaders. In a much more kingly response, David feels an obligation to come to the aid of his Israelite brethren and seeks divine guidance about whether he should engage the Philistines in battle. The Lord instructs David to attack the Philistines and deliver Keilah."

David's men are uneasy about the decision to fight the Philistines, and they let David know it. Their apprehension is not really hard to understand. After all, this small force of 600 men (23:13) is not a highly trained group of soldiers, but a rag-tag group of discontented men who have fled from Saul (22:2). Most of these men joined forces with David while he was hiding in the cave of Adullam. More likely this cave was most likely in Philistine territory, and if not, on the very fringe of Israel's territory. From here David and his men went to Moab, where they hid out in the **"stronghold"** (22:4-5). The prophet Gad instructed David to cease hiding out in foreign nations and to return to the land of his own tribe, Judah, which he did by hiding out in the forest of Hereth (22:5). In the dense, difficult terrain of this forest, David's men must still feel relatively safe out of Saul's reach. But it is an entirely different matter when David is instructed to fight the Philistines at Keilah. This is a much more difficult and dangerous venture. They will have to come out of hiding and out into the open to fight the Philistines, knowing this will expose them to an attack by Saul's forces. Since Keilah is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Gath, David and his men will no longer be in the mountains hiding safely in the forest, but rather in the lowlands, out in the open, where they can be seen by Saul's army and opposed by Philistine chariots. When David's men protest the decision to rescue the people of Keilah, they seem to do so on the basis of the greatly increased risk. This is not the safe thing to do. It would be far safer to hide from Saul in the forest than to attack the Philistines on the open plains.

David listens to the objections raised by his men, but he is intent on obeying God rather than men. He **"inquired of the Lord"** a second time (23:4) and receives the same response, with the assurance that God has already given them the victory. With this assurance, David and his men approach the city of Keilah and attack the Philistines, winning a decisive victory and delivering the Israelites there from defeat and securing the Philistines' livestock (23:5). How strange are the ways of God. A week earlier, who among them would have thought they would be eating T-bone steaks from Philistine cattle?

Having delivered the people of Keilah from defeat at the hand of the Philistines, one assumes these people would be some of David's most loyal supporters. Surely they would give David and his men sanctuary from Saul. Saul learns of David's presence in Keilah, however, and summons all of Israel to attack the city of Keilah, assured that this will result in the capture of David and his men. After all, Keilah is a fortified city. Saul supposes that the "double gates and bars" of that city will not keep him out, but rather will contain David and his men within.

David learns of Saul's coming attack and wonders whether it is wise to stay in Keilah. David seems to want to avoid his own capture, but he is also concerned about the well being of the people of Keilah. Has he rescued these people from the Philistines only so Saul's army can destroy the city? Fortunately, when Abiathar fled to join David, he brought the ephod with him by which the will of the Lord could be discerned (23:6). Wishing to know and do the will of God, David inquires of the Lord by means of the ephod. David has two questions to ask of God. First, is Saul really going to come to Keilah, as David has heard? Is his intelligence report accurate? Second, if Saul really does come to Keilah, will the people of Keilah betray David and turn him over to Saul?

The answer to both questions is "Yes." Notice, however, that the answer to both questions is hypothetical, based upon some variables. Had David remained in Keilah, Saul's men would have come and attacked the city. Had David remained and Saul's men come and attacked the city, the men of Keilah would have turned David over to Saul. But knowing this leads David to leave Keilah before Saul arrives. Consequently, Saul does not actually attack the city, nor do the men of Keilah actually surrender David to Saul. But they would have, had David stayed.

The *first* thing to note about David's inquiry and the divine response is this: *God not only knows all things that will be, He also knows all things that could be, under any set of circumstances.* It is one thing to know what the future holds. It is vastly greater to know what the future could hold, under differing circumstances. *God's omniscience (omniscient = to know all) is such that He knows all things actual and all things possible.* This is precisely how God can be in control of all things (the sovereignty of God), without being responsible for men's sin. For example, God knew that given the circumstances, Judas would betray the Lord Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. The betrayal of Jesus was a necessary part of God's plan, and there was no doubt that it would happen. God's omniscience made it all possible, yet without making Him culpable for man's sin. The same can be seen in Peter's words to the Jews (and Gentiles) who were responsible for the death of our Lord on the cross of Calvary:

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know -- 23 this *Man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death” (Acts 2:22-23, NASB).

And so it is that, informed by God as to the outcome of remaining in Keilah, David leaves that city with his 600 followers. He returns to the wilderness, hiding in the safety of the strongholds he finds there. Learning of David’s departure, Saul has his men turn back, and thus the city of Keilah is spared, not only from the Philistines but from Saul. Yet those who owe their lives to David would have betrayed him when the going got tough. In all of this, David too is spared from the wrath and jealousy of Saul, for God would not deliver His future king into his hand.

Conclusion

While many lessons could be gleaned from our text, one seems to stand above and apart from all others and can be summed up in these words:

When the whole world seems to be senseless and unpredictable, and when madmen have the power to carry out their wicked schemes which result in the suffering and death of the innocent, *God is still in control*. While not immediately apparent in the chaos and confusion, God’s plans and purposes are being accomplished, even by means of madmen who seek to overthrow His purposes and promises.

Throughout history, many Christians have lived during times best characterized by the words “madness” or “insanity.” How can we explain why a terrorist plants a bomb in a building that kills hundreds of people he never even knew? What sense can we make of a man who robs a clerk of a few dollars and then needlessly kills him? Why would a teenager drive by a school emptying an automatic weapon into a crowd of students? Much of what we see going on in our world does not make sense – it is insane. Do we wring our hands in despair, as though in the midst of such chaos and violence God cannot be in control?

Our text assures us that even in the midst of insanity, God is in control. King Saul is out of his head when he orders Doeg the Edomite to kill all the priests and their families. It all seems senseless and insane. We know that many innocent people were killed that day, and we must in no way attempt to justify it. But at the same time, we must not overlook the fact that God used Saul – in his most irrational moments – to accomplish His purposes and promises. In

chapters 2 and 3 of 1 Samuel, Eli is told that due to the wickedness of his sons, his priesthood will be taken away,

27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house? 28 ‘And did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel? 29 ‘Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded *in My dwelling*, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?’ 30 “Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, ‘I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever’; but now the LORD declares,’ Far be it from Me-- for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. 31 ‘Behold, the days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of your father's house so that there will not be an old man in your house. 32 ‘And you will see the distress of *My dwelling*, in *spite of* all that I do good for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever. 33 ‘Yet I will not cut off every man of yours from My altar that your eyes may fail *from weeping* and your soul grieve, and all the increase of your house will die in the prime of life. 34 ‘And this will be the sign to you which shall come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them shall die’” (1 Samuel 2:27-34, NASB).

11 And the LORD said to Samuel, “Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 “In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 “For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. 14 “And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever” (1 Samuel 3:11-14, NASB).

Because of Eli's sin of failing to deal with his sons, Eli's priesthood was to be taken away. The sign that this would happen was the death of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas (2:34). The next phase of the fulfillment of this prophecy comes in our text, brought about by the insane jealousy of Saul when he orders Doeg, the Edomite, to kill all the priests and their families. One survivor is left, just as God indicated (2:33). The next phase of fulfillment will come in the days of Solomon when the priesthood is taken from Abiathar, the descendant of

Aaron's son, Ithamar, and given to Zadok, the descendant of Aaron through his son, Eleazar (1 Kings 2:27, 35). The full and final fulfillment seems to be the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the faithful priest (see Psalm 110; Hebrews 5:6; Revelation 19:16).¹⁰⁰

Who would have ever thought that the prophecy of chapters 2 and 3 would be fulfilled as described in chapter 22 by a virtual madman? Even in his disobedience and insanity; even in his rebellion against God by the slaughter of the priests, Saul is being used of God to fulfil His promise, yet in a way that does not impugn the character of God.

Notice the similarity between the prophecies God made concerning Eli's priesthood in chapters 2 and 3 and the prophecies God gives concerning Saul's kingship in chapters 13 and 15. Because of his sin in failing to deal with his sons' abuse of their priesthood, Eli's priesthood was taken away. A significant part of this we now see described in chapter 22. Is the fulfillment of God's promise to Eli here not given to us at this point in the story to buttress the prophecy God made concerning Saul's kingship? Just as surely as Eli's priesthood was taken away a few years and a few chapters later, so Saul's kingship is taken away a few years and a few chapters later. God always keeps His promises, and He sometimes does so by employing the most unlikely instruments.

Second, we can see in our text how fast and how far a seemingly trivial sin can take us downward. Saul's sins in chapters 13 and 15 are serious sins, but they do not appear to have many great immediate ramifications. *Beware of trivial sins, for it will not be long until these sins grow significantly.* Saul, who is initially fearful and reticent, failing to fully carry out God's instructions, now is a raving maniac, who has fallen so fast and so far he can order all of the priests to be put to death. *Sin almost always appears to be harmless, but it is never long before its real character is evident.*

Third, let me to make a brief observation, and then ask a question. It appears to me that Christians are often among those most likely to believe and even promote conspiracy theories. Why has the FCC received so many letters from Christians, protesting against alleged plots by Madelyn Murray O'Haire to ban Christian programs from radio and television? We seem predisposed to believe conspiracy claims. I wonder why. Let us not be paranoid. Neither let us be oblivious to Satan's schemes.

Fourth, I see in our text three prototypes. Saul is a prototype of the antichrists who have come and who will come, resisting God and His Messiah, Jesus Christ. Herod is one such antichrist (see Matthew 2). The scribes and Pharisees are another example of antichrists (see Matthew

27:18; Mark 15:10; John 11:47-48). As Saul joins forces with Doeg, a Gentile, in his attempt to do away with David's threat to his throne, the Jewish leaders joined forces with the Gentiles to execute Christ. David is a prototype of Christ, who is rejected and resisted because he is to become God's king. Ahimelech is a prototype of all those who suffer and die for associating with Jesus Christ, as he died for his association with David.

Finally, I see in our text another very important lesson, which can be summed up in this way:

Safety for the Christian is not gained by isolation or by hiding out from the dangers of this world; it is found by those who cast themselves upon God for His guidance and care, as they seek to carry out His work and His will.

David and his men initially seem to think that the further they are from Saul, the safer they are. David finds that it is not all that safe in Gath with the Philistines. He may have felt safe in or near Moab territory, but the prophet Gad instructs him to return to the territory of Judah. And when David's men feel relatively safe in the forest of Hereth, God directs them to go to Keilah, where they are exposed not only to Philistine attack but to an attack by Saul.

David is God's man, God's choice for king, and he is indestructible until God's work for him is done. He does not need to hide out or play it safe, especially when it hinders his carrying out his mission and ministry (such as saving the people of Keilah). David does not have to calculate his safety in terms of distance from danger; *He calculates his safety in terms of the nearness of God.* A kind of escapism is found in Christian circles today, as though remoteness is the key to safety. I challenge this kind of thinking. *God may lead some to remote places, but let us not seek to hide out when God calls us to be salt and light in this dark place.*

Let me also say that trusting in God and doing what is right is no guarantee of physical safety. In our text, Ahimelech is a noble, godly man, who stands up against Saul and for David when he knows the risk of so doing. He is a man who is murdered, along with his family and his fellow-priests. In the ultimate sense, Ahimelech and his fellow-martyrs could never have been safer than in the arms of God. They are just as "safe" as David, but their mission is done, and David's is not. *Living a godly life is no guarantee of safety from suffering, troubles, and even death. But God will not allow these things to keep us from that for which He has called us. Until our work for Him is done, no one can be safer than the Christian who trusts and obeys, even in the most dangerous of circumstances.*

1 Samuel 23:15-29

David's Danger

(23:15)

15 Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh.¹⁰²

I believe verse 15 is intended to say much more than the bare fact that David learns Saul is after him. What is new about this news? Only that Saul has gotten close. But the expression **“became aware that”** is literally **“saw.”** David *saw* that Saul had come out to seek his life. The word for “saw” is so similar to the word for *fear* that some have even suggested the author must have meant to say that David was afraid. I would not favour changing the text without support, but the sense is just about the same. The full weight of Saul's pursuit and its implications seems to bear down on him. Perhaps weary in both body and spirit, David is greatly distressed to hear that, once again, Saul is nearby, fully intent on killing him. There is ample evidence to show that if given the chance, Saul will do so. I am reminded of several proverbs, which may convey some of what the text is implying to us:

15 In the light of a king's face is life, And his favor is like a cloud with the spring rain (16:15).

12 The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, But his favor is like dew on the grass (19:12).

2 The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life (20:2).

15 *Like* a roaring lion and a rushing bear Is a wicked ruler over a poor people (28:15).

Welcome Words from a Welcome Visitor

(23:16-18)

16 And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God. 17 Thus he said to him, “Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also.” 18 So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house.

As I read these words, I am again reminded of some of the Proverbs:

11 *Like* apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances (Proverbs 25:11).

25 *Like* cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land (Proverbs 25:25).

Saul may be looking for David, but it is Jonathan who finds David. Jonathan could not have appeared at a more opportune time, nor could his words have been any better chosen. The purpose of Jonathan's visit is to encourage David in God. Jonathan's encouragement is summed up in verse 17, with the following elements:

(1) Jonathan tells David not to be afraid.

With all of Saul's resources, it seems virtually impossible for David to escape his grasp. Saul has publicly ordered David to be detained and brought to him, or at least to reveal his place of hiding. Saul has the power and determination to retaliate against anyone who seems in any way to support David. The death toll in the city of Nob is testimony to this. Saul will also reward anyone who is loyal to him and assists him in doing away with David. David's fears are not without reason; nevertheless, Jonathan tells David not to be afraid.

(2) Jonathan assures David that in spite of his father's efforts to find him, he will not succeed.

(3) Jonathan's assurance regarding David's safety seems based upon his confidence in God's designation of David as the next king.

If David is God's choice for Israel's next king, then no one, including King Saul, will be able to kill him and thwart God's purposes and promises. Jonathan's assurance is rooted in the sovereignty of the God whom he and David serve, whom Saul seeks to resist.

(4) Jonathan seeks to encourage David by assuring him of his submission and loyal service to him as Israel's future king.

Jonathan knows that God will somehow remove his father from the throne and install David as the next king. Jonathan not only joyfully accepts this fact, but has purposed to be David's most loyal servant and supporter. Not only will David escape from Saul's hand and ascend to the throne, he will find Jonathan sitting beside him as his helper.

(5) Finally, Jonathan's loyalty is not a secret.

Jonathan's father Saul is fully aware of his son's loyalty to David, even though he does not like it. Jonathan has not kept his association with David a secret. Surely this might encourage others in the kingdom to support David as well.

Jonathan is the Barnabas of the Old Testament. What great encouragers both these men are. In the Book of Acts, Barnabas starts out as the prominent leader, and Saul (the apostle Paul) is but a man whom Barnabas takes under his wing. As time passes, it becomes clear that God has chosen Paul to assume the dominant role. When this becomes evident, Barnabas joyfully accepts this fact and becomes Paul's most loyal supporter.

The same spirit is seen in Jonathan. He is the king apparent, the descendant of Saul whom all expect to rule in his father's place in time to come. Because of Saul's sins, God rejects him as king and designates David as the next king. Jonathan realizes this and, like Barnabas in New Testament times, becomes David's most loyal friend and supporter. When David is in danger and his spirit seems to wane, Jonathan makes his way to and through the wilderness to seek out his friend to encourage him. This he obviously does.

The outcome is yet another covenant between David and Jonathan. In fact, it is more likely a repetition of the same covenant they made earlier, perhaps with a few more details. The first covenant is in 18:1-4, where the words are not supplied, but the meaning is conveyed symbolically by Jonathan's stripping off of his armour and giving it to David. In chapter 20, David asks for Jonathan's help, based upon the covenant they have made (verse 8), and then Jonathan appeals to David that David spare his life and the lives of his descendants (verses 14-17).¹⁰³ Again, in verses 41 and 42 of chapter 20, David and Jonathan renew their covenant, as one that will endure throughout their descendants. There seems to be little doubt as to what the nature of the covenant is in chapter 23.

Before moving on to the remainder of chapter 23, let us reflect on the nature of Jonathan's ministry to David and how this illustrates the nature and practice of encouragement in every age, including our own.

First, encouragement comes at the right moment, and it picks the right words to say. Many are those who would have been one of Job's friends at this moment in David's life. They might have said, "What's the matter with you David? Don't you know it is a sin to be depressed? Read your Bible and pray." The Book of Proverbs has a great deal to say to us on this point.

Second, encouragement addresses fear and promotes courage. This has become a very important element of my definition of encouragement. Through the years, I have heard a lot of people speak of the gift of encouragement, or the gift of

exhortation, as though it gives one the right to meddle in the lives of others by giving them advice. Most commonly, I fear, is the assumption that encouragement is closely akin to flattery. A number of the “encouragers” I have seen make it a practice to compliment people on a job well done. I am not opposed to giving a word of praise to those who have done a good job, though we must be careful to be honest and not to flatter.¹⁰⁴ At its root, *encouragement is helping to instil courage upon those who are afraid.*

Consider this passage in Paul’s Epistle to the Thessalonians:

14 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, *encourage the fainthearted*, help the weak, be patient with all men (1 Thessalonians 5:14, emphasis mine).

In our text, Jonathan encourages (literally, *strengthened the hand of*) David by telling him not to be afraid. Encouragement is the ability to sense fear or faintheartedness in others and to minister to them in a way that inspires courage.

Third, encouragement produces the courage to act. I have already said that encouragement addresses fear and instils courage. But the encouragement which Jonathan illustrates is more than this. True encouragement is not just ministering to people so they feel better. It is ministering to people so they have the courage to do the hard thing, the thing they are afraid to do. Encouragement “strengthens the hand” of the one encouraged. It is the “hand” which then works, performing the task God has given.¹⁰⁵

Fourth, biblical encouragement gives discouraged men courage by turning their eyes toward God. Jonathan encourages David *in the Lord*. By all appearances David won’t live another week, let alone become Israel’s king. But God has anointed David by the hand of Samuel. It is God’s plan and purpose for David to reign over Israel, and if this is the case, God’s plans cannot be overturned. *The only basis for courage is David’s faith in God, in His word, in His promises, in His power, and in His faithfulness to finish what He has begun.* Jonathan turns David’s eyes Godward, from where courage comes. Throughout the Bible, the message is consistent: *courage comes from God* (Isaiah 35:4; 54:4; Jeremiah 30:10; Zechariah 9:9; John 12:15). *Courage comes through the Holy Spirit* (Micah 3:7-8; Haggai 2:3-5). *Courage comes through our Lord* (see Matthew 9:2, 22; 14:27; John 16:33; Acts 23:11).

Fifth, encouragement is more than mere words; it comes from people who exemplify courage, not just those who talk about it. It is hard to encourage another while your own knees are knocking. Courage is contagious, and so is fear. Saul is a man whose life is characterized by fear rather than faith. Is it any wonder that Saul’s army vaporizes when the “going gets tough”? Not at all! Saul’s fear permeates his army, and so his soldiers flee (see 1 Samuel 13:5-7;

17:11, 24, 32). Fearful men do not encourage others. It is men of courage who encourage others. If the writer of 2 Samuel tells us anything, it is that Jonathan, unlike his father, is a man of courage (see 1 Samuel 13:3; 14:1-14). It must take considerable courage for Jonathan to seek David out in the forest while his own father is nearby seeking to kill David.

When I find “encouragers” in the New Testament, I find men of courage. Barnabas is one of the great encouragers of the Book of Acts. We are introduced to Barnabas in Acts 4, where we are told by Luke that this man sells a tract of land and lays the proceeds at the apostles’ feet (4:36-37). I propose that Barnabas is not only a generous man, but a courageous man. Why do I not give more to others? If I am honest, it is because I am afraid, afraid that if I give to others, there won’t be enough left for me and my family. Is this not why Ananias and Sapphira lie about their gift, keeping back a portion of it for themselves for a “rainy day” perhaps (see Acts 5)?

It certainly is a brave thing for Barnabas to come to Paul’s aid in Acts 9. Here is this man, Saul, who arrests Christians and even has some put to death. Now he arrives in Jerusalem, claiming to have been converted to Christianity. Can you blame Christians for doubting his story and avoiding contact with him? But Barnabas is a man of faith and courage. He believes that God can save a man like Saul (most saints would agree with this), and he goes so far as to believe that God has saved Saul (this is where most of us would get off). Barnabas puts his life on the line (acting in courage), and thus he not only greatly encourages Saul (Paul), but greatly encourages the church to have courage and embrace this former enemy as a new creation in Christ. *It takes courage to encourage.*

I have long considered Barnabas a great encourager, but I am now forced to recognize how great an encourager Paul becomes (in part, thanks to Barnabas). Paul’s encouragement grows out of his own courage. In Philippians 1:14, Paul writes the Philippians that many “have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” because of his own steadfastness in suffering for the sake of the gospel (see 1:12-13). Notice in the midst of an incredible storm at sea how Paul’s courage has a positive impact even on those who are not saved:

21 And when they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, “Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete, and incurred this damage and loss. 22 “And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship. 23 “For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, 24 saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’ 25 “Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe

God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. 26 “But we must run aground on a certain island”. . . . 33 And until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. 34 “Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation; for not a hair from the head of any of you shall perish.” 35 And having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he broke it and began to eat. 36 And all of them were encouraged, and they themselves also took food. 37 And all of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons (Acts 27:21-26, 33-37).

It all comes down to this: those who encourage others do so first by being people of courage, and then instilling courage in others by pointing them to God, from whom holy courage comes. Jonathan is such a man, as were our Lord, Barnabas, and Paul. These men are models whom we should imitate.

Narrow Escape

(23:19-29)

19 Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is David not hiding with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? 20 “Now then, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to do so; and our part *shall be* to surrender him into the king's hand.” 21 And Saul said, “May you be blessed of the LORD; for you have had compassion on me. 22 “Go now, make more sure, and investigate and see his place where his haunt is, *and* who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning. 23 “So look, and learn about all the hiding places where he hides himself, and return to me with certainty, and I will go with you; and it shall come about if he is in the land that I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.” 24 Then they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. 25 When Saul and his men went to seek *him*, they told David, and he came down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard *it*, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon. 26 And Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain; and David was hurrying to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them. 27 But a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land.” 28 So Saul returned from pursuing David, and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they called that place the Rock of Escape. 29 And David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of Engedi.

Jonathan goes home while David remains in the strongholds of Horesh (verses 18-19). David's circumstances have not changed, but we have good reason to assume his outlook changed significantly. The people of that area were known as the Ziphites, the people of Ziph (verse 19ff.). They are people of the tribe of Judah, like David. In spite of this, they go to Saul at Gibeah, offering him the location of David so he can be captured. They are eager to win Saul's favor and likely just as eager to avoid his wrath. Thus they are willing to hand David over to him.

Saul's language in verse 21 is tragic. It sounds so pious, yet his holy words are only a veil to cover the wickedness of his intended actions. **“May you be blessed of the Lord. . . .”** What could sound more spiritual than this? This use of God's name is “vain,” common, profane. This is what God forbids – using His name in vain, in a common and degrading way (Deuteronomy 5:11). Saul dares not bless in the name of the Lord those who are acting in rebellion against him, and assisting Saul in his rebellion against God. It is not spiritual to bless those who would curse God's anointed. It is not spiritual to betray one's own kinsman. How ironic that the Ziphites would show compassion toward Saul, when Saul's son, Jonathan, shows compassion toward David.

Saul is beginning to wise up. He does not immediately summon his troops to make another attempt to arrest David. After all, it seems as though he has just gotten back from his last abortive effort. This time he intends to be more cautious, because it wouldn't look good to come back empty-handed. He tells the Ziphites to carefully watch David's movements, to note his hiding places and routes of travel, and then notify him when they know precisely where he is located. Then Saul feels sure that he will capture his foe.

Verse 22 is noteworthy. Saul tells the Ziphites that *he is told* David is cunning. Why does he not say he has personally found him to be this way? It may be because much of Saul's intelligence concerning David comes second hand by those whom Saul should not really trust, men like Doeg the Edomite. We will make more of this when we come to verse 9 of chapter 24. Second-hand information is virtual hearsay and should not be taken as though it were the essence of the truth.

The Ziphites return to their land, ready and willing to carry out Saul's orders. In the meantime, David has moved on a few miles to the wilderness (or desert) of Maon (verse 25).¹⁰⁶ Saul and his men appear once again in hot pursuit. What a place for a helicopter view of the chase! David is hurrying to get away from Saul and his men as he makes his way around the mountain. Behind, in pursuit, are Saul and his men. They continue to gain ground, or perhaps they are coming after David in the opposite direction so that they are just about to meet face to

face. Perhaps Saul has troops pursuing David and his men from both directions. In one way or another, David and his men are in the process of being surrounded. It is only a matter of time before they are going to fall into Saul's grasp. We can see Saul's men getting closer and closer. We can also see that all means of escape are being sealed off. There is no way out. They are finished.

Suddenly, when Saul's men are almost close enough to touch, a shout is heard. A messenger is calling out to Saul, informing him that Israel has come under attack by the Philistines. It must not be at Keilah, for Saul doesn't seem to care about this city's problems with the Philistines. Could it be much closer to Gibeah, Saul's home? The situation is viewed as being so serious that Saul breaks off his pursuit, just seconds away from success. He orders his men to turn around and go back down the mountain to assemble to march out to confront the Philistine army.

The suspense is so intense, so thick, one could almost cut it with a knife. David and his men look like goners, but God spares them. The irony is that while Saul is David's enemy, the Philistines are unwittingly his allies. Their attack is God's means of delivering His anointed king, David, from the grasp of King Saul.

Conclusion

Who would ever believe it? Who would imagine that Saul could get so close to killing David, and then turn back at the last possible moment? Who would have believed a hostile attack against Israel would be God's means for preserving the life of her next king? Those who know God believe it. In fact, we should almost expect it. God's resources are so infinite, He is not forced to deliver His chosen ones in the same boring fashion, endlessly repeating one miracle over and over. *God often saves when all human hope is gone, and then in ways we would never have predicted or expected. He does so because He is God, because His resources are unlimited, and because His way of doing things is beyond our wildest imaginations.*

Not only does God deliver David in a most unusual way, He also encourages him in a unique way. God encourages David by an unexpected visit in a remote, hard-to-find spot. This is not on Jonathan's way to somewhere else. It is a place where David intends not to be found, and yet he is. And the one whom God chooses to encourage David, hotly pursued by King Saul, is none other than the king's son, Jonathan.

We must close this lesson with the words of Scripture which say it better than we ever could:

6 Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. 9 “For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. 10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:6-11).

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-36).



Waterfall at En-Gedi where Saul hunted the fugitive David

1 Samuel 24:1-22

24. David spares Saul's life

Verses 1-15. David spares Saul in the wilderness of En Gedi

Verses 16-22. Saul's reply to David

David Refuses to Cave-in to Peer Pressure

(24:1-7)

1 Now it came about when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. 3 And he came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there *was* a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. 4 And the men of David said to him, "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly. 5 And it came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's *robe*. 6 So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed." 7 And David persuaded his men with *these* words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on *his* way.

In chapter 23, Saul seems to have David within his grasp. He is closing in on David when a messenger informs him that Israel is under attack, forcing Saul to give up his pursuit of David to engage the Philistines. We do not know how Saul fares in his confrontation with the Philistines, but we do know he returns in one piece, just as zealous to capture David. Someone has informed Saul that David is now in the wilderness of Engedi.¹⁰⁸

Saul expects to encounter David in front of the **"Rocks of the Wild Goats"** (24:2)¹⁰⁹ and sets out in that direction. I imagine Saul has learned as much about this general area as possible and concluded that this remote spot in the mountains of Judea would likely be David's hideout if he knew Saul was in pursuit. It would seem David does just the opposite. Instead of fleeing from the wilderness Engedi to **the "Rocks of the Wild Goats,"** David heads in the opposite direction, right toward Saul. The paths of the two men cross at some

sheep pens, where there is also a cave. Saul feels the urge of nature and begins to look about for a place where he can privately relieve himself.

Think of yourself as one of David's men, peering out from that cave, watching Saul and his army draw near, and then stop. I can almost feel the tension as Saul's eyes turn toward the cave. David's men crouch low at the back of the cave and silently moan as they see Saul approach them. Little do they know what Saul has in mind. It must look as though they are finished. Saul approaches the cave as David and his men grasp their weapons, ready to defend themselves. What follows need not be described, except to say that it was a relief to both Saul and David's men.

David's men are more at ease now, and they begin to ponder the meaning of this moment. It looks to them as though God has given them the opportunity to kill Saul. A prophecy is recited to David, which says,

4 "Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you" (verse 4).

In the light of David's response, one must come to one of several choices. *First*, one might say this is a false prophecy, which should be rejected (see 1 Kings 22). *Second*, this may be a prophecy related to someone (some enemy) other than Saul, and wrongly applied to Saul by David's men. *Third*, this prophecy may be genuine and related to Saul, but wrongly interpreted and applied by David's men. I am inclined toward the third option.

David stealthily makes his way toward king Saul, who is oblivious to all that is happening behind him. His robe has apparently been removed and placed out of the way, far enough away that David can reach out and cut off a portion of the edge. Immediately, David's conscience smites him. There are those who believe this is because such an act was highly significant, somehow challenging or undermining Saul's right to rule.¹⁰⁰ I do not think so. It seems to me that David's intent is only to obtain proof that he had been able to come within striking distance of Saul, and yet did him no harm. In and of itself, this would not have troubled David, but the fact is that David damages Saul's garment. In today's terms, David might have slashed the tires on Saul's car. It is something like vandalism.

David's act should not be judged by the amount of damage done, but rather in terms of against whom it is done. A seemingly trivial action would be taken very seriously if it were done to the President of the United States. David's action was committed against his king. It matters not that the action is a small one, certainly trivial when compared to the assassination his men want. He has raised his hand against his king, and in so doing, he has raised his hand against his

God. It is God who has raised up Saul, and it is God who will remove him, in some way that does not include David acting with hostility toward him:

10 David also said, “As the LORD lives, surely the LORD will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish” (1 Samuel 26:10).

However Saul is removed, it is God who will remove him, not David. Until God does remove Saul as king, it is David’s duty to faithfully serve his king, and cutting off a portion of his robe was not done to further Saul’s interests. For this reason, David’s conscience troubles him.¹¹⁵

David is conscience-stricken over his taking a portion of Saul’s robe. His men, on the other hand, are plotting much worse things for Saul. David’s success with garment cutting inspires his men to solve the Saul problem once for all. Saul is vulnerable at this moment. His men are out of sight (Saul surely wants to conduct his business in private), and so they can simply do him in.¹¹⁶ This is something they seem intent on doing, and only the most forceful reaction on David’s part turns them from their intended course of action. The translation of verse 7 in most versions is amazingly bland (“**persuaded**,” NASB), compared to the word the author employs (the marginal note in the NASB indicates that a literal translation would be *tore apart*).^{117 118} At the mention of killing the king, David literally tears into his men, fiercely defending the life of the king and demanding that, just as he would not lift his hand against the king, neither will they. While David’s men look at David in wonder, Saul finishes his task, gathers up his (now altered) robe, and goes out of the cave.

David and Goliath #2¹¹⁵

(24:8-15)

8 Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. 9 And David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, ‘Behold, David seeks to harm you’? 10 “Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but *my eye* had pity on you; and I said, ‘I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’S anointed.’ 11 “Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. 12 “May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge

me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. 13 “As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. 14 “After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? 15 “The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause, and deliver me from your hand.”

To kill Saul is to resist the Lord's anointed, and such an act cannot be godly. Thus, David's men's use of the divine revelation is a wrong, and so David adamantly resists and refuses. David is to do to Saul **“what seems good”** to him. What seems good to David is to submit to his king and to faithfully serve him, seeking his best interest. This certainly means that David must not oppose Saul or act in any way that will be detrimental to him. Submission to his king means much more than this to David. It means acting in a way that promotes Saul's best. David's interpretation of what **“is good”** in reference to Saul surprises Saul for certain, and undoubtedly everyone else who witnesses the next event.

David and his men are safely hidden in the cave. All they need do is keep quiet and let Saul and his men leave. They can then make their escape in the opposite direction. Abandoning all efforts at self-protection or evasion, David emerges from the cave, calling out to Saul. He addresses Saul as his **“lord the king”** (verse 8), and a little later as his **“father”** (verse 11). David prostrates himself on the ground, showing his reverence for and submission to Saul as the king (verse 8). He appeals to the king to set aside the things others have told him, to listen to his words, to compare them with his actions, and then to judge his guilt or innocence for himself.

David challenges the charge that he is seeking Saul's defeat or death. He is not striving to gain the throne by removing Saul from it. Showing Saul the portion of his robe he cut off, David urges Saul to acknowledge that while he could have killed his king, he did not. Saul is God's anointed. To harm the king is to act in rebellion against God, who enthroned him. When Saul's life was in David's hands, David protected him, keeping his men from killing him. And now, David puts his life into Saul's hands, and ultimately into God's hands, for it is to God that David has made his ultimate appeal. It is to Him that he looks for justice. Because of this, he need not act against Saul himself.

David reminds the king that men can be known by their fruits. In the words of the ancient proverb, David quotes, **“Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness”** (verse 13). David has done nothing wicked toward Saul, and he assures Saul his hand will not be against him in the future (verse 13). He also reminds the king that his fears about David are exaggerated. David likens

himself to a dead dog and to a single flea (verse 14). How can such a great man as Saul, with all his military might, can have such fears about David?

David closes his argument by telling Saul that he has committed himself into God's care. He has left judgment and retribution to God. He looks to God for justice and for protection from Saul's attacks (verse 15). With this, David rests his case. It is now time for Saul to respond, and that he does.

Saul's "Repentance" and Request

(24:16-22)

16 Now it came about when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 And he said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. 18 "And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and *yet* you did not kill me. 19 "For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. 20 "And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 21 "So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." 22 And David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Saul is shocked to hear his name called out from behind. He can hardly believe his ears, that it is actually David calling to him. Saul lifts up his voice, weeping, calling David his **"son."** How much easier this is after David has called him his **"father"** in verse 11, and after David bows down to him as a faithful servant to the king. It is obvious that David has Saul's life in his hands, and he spares it. How unlike himself David is! Saul confesses that David is righteous, but he is not. He has done wickedly toward David, and yet David has done **"good"** toward him in response. David would not have let him go if he were his enemy, and thus he must be his friend. And so Saul invokes God's blessings upon David.

Verse 20 is an amazing confession from Saul. For the first time recorded in Scripture, Saul owns up to the truth. He has been told by Samuel that his kingdom will not endure (13:14), that he has been rejected by God as Israel's king (15:26). In chapter 18 (verses 8-9), Saul indicates that David is so popular, the only thing left is for him to possess the kingdom. In 20:31, Saul tells Jonathan that he will never inherit the throne so long as David is alive.

Elsewhere, Saul deals with David as a traitor, plotting to do him in and take over the kingdom (see 22:6-13). But here, for the very first time, Saul acknowledges that God is taking his kingdom away from him and giving it to David. He admits that David's ascent to the throne is a certainty.

Because of this, Saul petitions David to swear that he will not kill off his descendants (24:21). Saul's concerns are not entirely groundless. It was common practice for men who ascended to the throne to wipe out every possible heir to the throne, especially the descendants of the king he overthrew or replaced (see 2 Kings 10:11, 15-17; 11:1). The irony of Saul's request is that this matter was already taken care of in the covenant between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:14-17, 41-42). Nevertheless, David swears to Saul that he will not destroy all of his descendants.¹¹⁶

The two men part.¹¹⁷ David goes up to the stronghold, while Saul goes back to his home (24:22). David is probably hopeful that his troubles with Saul have ended, but he is no fool. Saul has "repented" before (see 19:1-7), but it did not last long. David will see what Saul's long-term response is by watching from a distance. The other side of this coin may be that David is actually serving Saul in a backhanded fashion. Are the people turning to David and looking down upon Saul? Then David will keep his distance, staying out of the public eye so that Saul's popularity may not be undermined.

Conclusion

This is truly an amazing story. Who would ever have thought that "nature's call" would result in the peaceful parting of David and Saul on such an occasion? God is sovereign. He is in absolute control of all things, and "all things" includes things as basic as the "call of nature." By means of this very natural (our children would say "gross" or something of the sort) event, some very supernatural things happened. First, David and Saul met and parted, yet without the shedding of any blood. Saul confessed things we would never have expected from him. David not only repented of his act of cutting off a portion of Saul's robe, he kept his men from killing Saul. And all of this is the result of Saul looking for a pit stop, and finding it in the very cave where David and his men "just happened" to be hiding. God is able to employ "nature" to achieve His purposes. What a marvelous God we serve!

In his book, *Spiritual Leadership*, J. Oswald Sanders speaks of three principles which govern spiritual leadership:

Sovereignty

Suffering

Servanthood

I believe this dear brother is absolutely right, and that these three principles can be seen in the life of David as God prepares him for spiritual leadership. Let us consider each of the three.

Sovereignty

The *first* factor in spiritual leadership is the sovereignty of God. I attended a meeting in which Sanders told of how God called him to leadership. He was engaged in a very different kind of ministry, as he had been most of his life, when he was contacted about becoming the head of a large missionary organization. It took Sanders (and his wife) a year to recognize the persistence of this organization as an evidence of His sovereign call to leadership. It is God who sovereignly raises up spiritual leaders (see the way God raises up Saul/Paul in Acts).

The sovereignty of God is one of the principle factors in David's thinking about leadership as well. God sovereignly raised up Saul as Israel's king. Though Samuel anoints David as Israel's next king, David believes it is God who will remove Saul and that this is not his task. So long as God keeps Saul in power, to lift his hand against Saul is to lift his hand against God. Circumstances may have been favourable for David or one of his men to kill Saul, but David's belief in the sovereignty of God keeps him from doing so.

Satan rebelled against the sovereign rule of God. He was not willing to serve God, but wanted to lead, like God. Sin is rebellion against God, against his sovereignty. It is seeking to rise above God. David submits to the sovereignty of God. And he does so by leaving vengeance to God. John Murray's comments on Romans 12:19 are most pertinent:

"Here we have what belongs to the essence of piety. The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands. It is faith to commit ourselves to God, to cast all our care upon him and to vest all our interests in him. In reference to the matter in hand, the wrongdoing of which we are the victims, the way of faith is to recognize that God is judge and to leave the execution of vengeance and retribution to him."¹¹⁸

Suffering

The *second* factor in spiritual leadership is suffering. Oswald Sanders spoke of one of his first sermons (some 65 years earlier!). He said that after his message, he could not help but overhear two women discussing his sermon. One woman asked the other, "Well, what did you think?" The second woman responded, "Not bad, but he'll be much better when he has suffered." Sanders then went on

to describe how God brought him through suffering by the death of two wives and one niece. When I hear many contemporary Christian musicians, I feel like that woman who heard Sanders' first sermon. I believe they will be better after they have tasted suffering. They often write and sing their music as very young and inexperienced people. Most have not tasted the cup of suffering and sorrow. Suffering has a way of changing you and your message.

From the time David is anointed king to the time he is appointed king, David endures a great deal of suffering. Most of his suffering comes from the hand of Saul. David's ascent to the throne is not *in spite of* his suffering, but by means of it. Suffering is the means by which God prepares David for leadership. And this is no exception. Joseph's suffering at the hand of his brothers prepared Joseph to lead and prepared a way of deliverance for his family. Israel's suffering in Egypt prepared the people of God for the exodus and their life as free men and women. Our Lord's suffering prepared Him for the ministry which He will have as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Our suffering accomplishes exactly the same thing.

David's men are tempting him to shortcut his sufferings and to hasten his rule as king by killing Saul. Their temptation is little different from the temptation of our Lord by Satan in the wilderness at the beginning of his public ministry (see Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-12). *We too are tempted to avoid suffering and to get right into the glory, but suffering is God's appointed means of bringing us to glory.* David is willing to suffer in order to obey God, even though it seems to be inconsistent with his future reign.

Servanthood

The *final* factor Sanders describes in relation to spiritual leadership is servanthood. Servanthood and submission are very closely related in my mind. Both are very much involved in God's preparation of David for kingship. A servant is one who faithfully serves another. David is Saul's faithful servant, even when Saul is seeking to take his life. *Submission is subordinating your own personal interests to serve another.*

David serves his master, Saul, faithfully. His conscience troubles him when he cuts off a portion of Saul's robe. This is not serving Saul faithfully. He refuses to consider killing Saul, or to let his men do so. This is not serving Saul. Suffering is the price David is willing to pay to serve Saul faithfully. Saul is, in a sense, David's enemy, and God has put his life in David's hands. But David believes that in order to do what is good in his sight, he will have to serve Saul, not slay him. And in order to serve Saul, he will have to endanger his own life. So David lets Saul go and then reveals himself to Saul outside the cave. David goes so far as to submissively rebuke Saul, pointing out that he is not his enemy, and that he has done only good toward him. David never ceases to serve Saul in

submission, as long as he is alive and as long as he is God's king. David does **“good”** toward Saul, as Saul himself confesses, and this David does by suffering at Saul's hand, by serving Saul, and by submitting himself to Saul, looking ultimately to the sovereign God for justice and retribution.

These guiding principles of *sovereignty, suffering, and servanthood* enable David to discern the will of God in his circumstances. David's men (1 Samuel 24:4), much like Saul (1 Samuel 23:7), discern God's will on the basis of favourable circumstances: God gives them the opportunity to kill Saul, and thus it must be God's will for them to do so. David discerns God's will on principle. He chooses to fight Goliath, not because it looks as though he is sure to win (though he does have this certainty, no one else does), but because this man is blaspheming God. David is not willing to take advantage of his circumstances because he is thinking like a spiritual leader, thinking in terms of the sovereignty of God, suffering as a part of God's will and servanthood.

I see much less of David's discernment of God's will today than I do of Saul's or of David's men. I hear many Christians think and teach that suffering is not God's will, and that true faith will be rewarded by immediate blessing and the absence of pain. I find that many discern God's will by looking only at favorable circumstances, rather than living by faith in God's word, and not by sight. I see many Christians getting their guidance from other misguided Christians, rather than standing alone on biblical principle. Let us be like David in this regard, and not like his men who only want to end the pain by killing God's anointed. Such self-serving is precisely what we see in the scribes and Pharisees (along with the masses, including the Romans), when they rejected Christ and crucified him, releasing Barabbas instead.

I see in David's life, as described in 1 Samuel, an example and illustration of many biblical texts on the subjects of suffering, servanthood, and submission. Though we cannot consider them now, let me simply list some texts for your further consideration: Psalm 7; Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:17, 19; 1 Peter 2:11-22; 4:12-19. Let us all seek to be men and women, like David, who have a heart after God's own heart, to His glory and for our good.



The Judean Wilderness, where David hid from Saul

1 Samuel 25:1-44

25. David, Nabal, and Abigail

Verse 1. Samuel's obituary

Verses 2-42. David obtains Abigail as his wife

Verses 43-44. David also takes Ahinoam as his wife

David Suffers a Great Loss

(25:1)

1 Then Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.¹⁰

Samuel has been one of the central personalities in the Book of 1 Samuel, which is named after him. He was the one who designated and anointed Saul and Israel's first king (chapters 9 and 10). He was also the prophet who informed

Saul that his kingship was going to be taken away (chapters 13 and 15). Samuel was the prophet who anointed David as Saul's replacement (chapter 16). Samuel was a man to whom David could flee when he was being pursued by Saul (19:18-24). And now, Samuel is dead. What a great loss David must sense. Samuel is dead, he has met with his beloved friend Jonathan for the last time (chapter 23), and his wife Michal, who is also Saul's daughter, has been given to another man for his wife (25:44). On top of all this, David's parents have been placed in the care of the king of Moab (22:3). True, David does have 600 men with him, but not a one of them seem to share David's convictions concerning his submission to King Saul. How lonely David must be.

David, along with many other Israelites, goes to Samuel's home at Ramah where he mourns for this great man of God. After this time of mourning, David once again goes into hiding in the wilderness of Paran. This is the wilderness where Hagar and her son Ishmael lived after being sent away by Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 21:21). It is also the place where the Israelites camped after leaving Mt. Sinai, and from which the 12 spies were sent to spy out the land of Canaan (Numbers 10:12; 13:3). Now, it is the place of David's hiding.

Sheering Time is Sharing Time

(25:2-8)

2 Now *there was* a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel 3 (now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in *his* dealings, and he was a Calebite), 4 that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. 5 So David sent ten young men, and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, visit Nabal and greet him in my name; 6 and thus you shall say, 'Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. 7 'And now I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days they were in Carmel. 8 'Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore let *my* young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.' "

We are introduced here to two very important characters in our story, a man named Nabal, and his wife, Abigail. Nabal is a very wealthy man (by ancient standards). His home is in Maon, and his livestock are kept in Carmel, a very few miles away. It is here, near Carmel, that David and his men have been

hiding for some time. The name Nabal means fool, and so he is. We are told that he is harsh and evil in his doings (verse 3). His wife is a refreshing contrast. Abigail is a wonderful blend of good looks and good thinking.

David learns that Nabal is sheering his sheep. When the sheering is done, there is a time of celebration for all the workers, and for anyone else nearby who is not so fortunate. During this festive time, Judah goes up to Timnah, and there manages to get his daughter-in-law Tamar pregnant (Genesis 38:12-26). At this time of celebration, Absalom persuades David to let his sons come to his home to celebrate, thus enabling Absalom to have his revenge against Amnon by killing him (2 Samuel 13:23-29). We know that at such times the Law of Moses instructed the Israelites to be generous with those who were not so fortunate (see Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:10-13; Nehemiah 8:10-12). For David to ask Nabal for a gift is not unusual at all. And since David's men had contributed to Nabal's well-being and wealth, David's request is even more reasonable.

David sends ten of his young men to Nabal, who greet Nabal in David's name and pronounce a blessing upon him and his household. They call Nabal's attention to the fact that it is sheering time, reminding him that their presence has not been detrimental to him, but they have performed for Nabal a very beneficial service. David's men have not harmed any of Nabal's servants. Indeed, David and his men have protected Nabal's flocks and shepherds. Nabal is encouraged to ask his servants to verify the truth of these words. And so it is that they very politely ask Nabal for a gift, waiting patiently and expectantly for his response.

Nabal Returns Evil for Good

(25:9-13)

9 When David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David's name; then they waited. 10 But Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. 11 "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?" 12 So David's young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words. 13 And David said to his men, "Each *of you* gird on his sword." So each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage.

There David's ten men stand before Nabal waiting for a response, and more specifically, for a gift. Nabal has several options. (1) He can send these men

back with a word of thanks and a generous gift. (2) Nabal can send David's servants back with a less than generous gift, barely living up to his obligation. (3) Nabal can send the ten men back to David with an apology (or a word of thanks), but no gift at all. (4) He can send David's servants back to him without any gift, and insult them at the same time he declines to give. To his great loss, Nabal chooses the last option.

At first glance, it seems from Nabal's words that he does not even know who David is. If this were true, Nabal would simply be refusing to give a gift to a stranger. But Nabal does know who David is. From his own words, he informs us that David is **"the son of Jesse."** He knows from this that David is one of the descendants of Judah, just as he is. Nabal is a **"Calebite"** (verse 3), and we know Caleb is the representative of the tribe of Judah sent into Canaan to spy out the land (Numbers 13:6). In other words, David is a distant relative of Nabal, and yet Nabal is unmoved by his request for a gift at this time of celebration.

Nabal knows much more than this, however. Not only does he know that David is a **"son of Jesse,"** he is also well aware of the tension between Saul and David. Nabal speaks of David as a **"servant of Saul,"** who is **"breaking away from his master."** Abigail, Nabal's wife, knows that David is the one designated to reign in Saul's place (verses 30-31). Nabal speaks only of David as a servant who has fled from his master, as though he were a mere runaway slave. I do not think Nabal refuses David's request out of fear of reprisal from Saul, knowing what happened to Ahimelech and the priests when the high priest gave David some of the sacred bread to eat, along with Goliath's sword. His message to David is not one of fear of reprisal, but one of pure selfishness and meanness. He will not share with David and his men anything that is his (note the repeated **"my"** in verse 11).

The final words of refusal Nabal speaks are noteworthy. He says to David's messengers, "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it *to men whose origin I do not know?*" (verse 11, emphasis mine). If I understand Nabal's words accurately, he is here revealing his own arrogance and snobbery. Nabal is a "Calebite." He comes from an outstanding family. David and his men, on the other hand, seem to come from obscure or unknown roots. Why should a man of Nabal's standing give anything to such riffraff? The irony of this is that David and Nabal come from the same root, Judah. And if Nabal thinks he can boast that Caleb is a part of his family tree, he should wake up and realize that he is nothing like his forefather, Caleb, yet David is just this kind of hero.

David's men return to him empty-handed. They repeat Nabal's words to David, and David completely "loses his cool." "Strap on your swords!" David barks

this order to his men as he straps on his own sword and heads out to make Nabal pay in a very different way – with his life, and the life of every male²⁸ in his household. In contemporary terms, David has “lost it.” In verses 21 and 22, David is still fuming, and as his words are disclosed to us, we see why:

21 Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this *man* has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. 22 “May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave *as much as* one male of any who belong to him.”

David is angry because his actions have not brought about the result he expected. He is not taking the “long view” of this matter at all. From his point of view, he has dealt kindly with Nabal, and now it is time for Nabal to deal kindly with him. But instead of giving a blessing to David and his men, Nabal insults them and sends them away empty-handed. All of his good works are for nothing, David concludes. And if Nabal will return evil for good, David is now justified in returning evil for evil.

It would be good to pause here to reflect on David’s attitude and actions. Let me sum up David’s reasoning.

David does good toward Nabal and all his household.

David expects Nabal to respond in kind, and instead he receives nothing but an insult.

David now feels justified in his intention to kill Nabal and every other male in his household.

All too many of us reason the same way David does in our text. But I must tell you that David is wrong, dead wrong. David is wrong to expect that the good we do will be responded to in kind. David has done good to Saul; he has faithfully served him and refused to take his life when given the chance to do so. But Saul responded with evil, rather than with good, which he confessed to David:

18 “You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and *yet* you did not kill me” (1 Samuel 24:17b-18).

David is somehow willing to deal with the treatment Saul hands out, but not with the insults of Nabal. Why? I think we may have a clue. First, Saul is David’s superior, in terms of authority. David is Saul’s servant. He is willing to take unfair treatment from his superior. Second, David has been promised the

kingdom, once Saul is out of the picture. David can handle abuse from Saul because he knows that before long he will fill Saul's vacated throne.

Nabal is not David's superior, and he does not at all like the treatment he receives from him. Furthermore, David is not thinking or acting as a man of faith when he sets out to kill Nabal and all the males in his household. David expects an immediate "return" on his "investment" of serving Nabal. He expects the reward to come from Nabal, now. He is not looking for a heavenly reward, then.

How many of us minister to others with a measuring stick in our hands? We are willing to love and serve others sacrificially, but with a certain set of expectations. We expect that sacrificial love and service should be reciprocated. When in return for our doing good, our neighbor gives us evil, like David, we get hot under the collar and look for some way to retaliate. We forget that, like Christ, our words and deeds may bring about persecution and suffering, rather than approval and gratitude. Our reward in heaven will be great, but there may be no such rewards on earth. Let us be careful to do our good works as to the Lord, looking to Him for our reward, and not the recipients of our sacrificial service. David may have learned here that the problem with acting like a servant is that people begin to treat you like a servant. It is one thing to serve in order to be promoted; it is something quite different to serve to be demoted.

A Secret Appeal to Abigail

(25:14-17)

14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them. 15 "Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. 16 "They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep. 17 "Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him."

One of the young men who serve Nabal observes the encounter between David's servants and Nabal. He knows how much David and his men have benefited his master and how offensive Nabal's response will be to David. Somehow he knows that David is coming, and that if something dramatic is not done quickly, there will be trouble for all. He also knows that Nabal is a fool, with whom he cannot reason. And so the servant does not speak to Nabal, but quickly appraises Abigail of the situation and the need for decisive action. It seems this servant

has a great regard for Abigail and her judgment, which is the reason he seeks her out. He does not suggest to Abigail what she should do, but simply tells her the facts and urges her to act with the wisdom she is known to have.

Abigail Responds While David Reacts

(25:18-22)

18 Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred *loaves* of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded *them* on donkeys. 19 And she said to her young men, “Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20 And it came about as she was riding on her donkey and coming down by the hidden part of the mountain, that behold, David and his men were coming down toward her; so she met them. 21 Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this *man* has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. 22 “May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave *as much as* one male of any who belong to him.”

We must take note that Abigail does not ask or inform Nabal about what she is doing. She does not ask because she knows what Nabal’s answer will be. She does not inform him of what she is doing because he will no doubt order the servants not to do as she has instructed. We shall soon see that Abigail’s actions are an example of true submission, even when on the surface they do not appear to be.

Acting quickly, Abigail gathers up generous portions of food which she sends on ahead by her servants. Speed is of the essence. David is on his way, and he is determined to kill every male he encounters at Nabal’s house, including Nabal. It would seem that the supplies reach David and his men before Abigail does, though we are not specifically told so. We are told only that she sends the supplies on ahead of her so as not to delay David’s reception of this gift.

I cannot help but wonder where Abigail got all of those supplies so quickly. I think I know, and if I am right, it is indeed an amusing situation. We know that Abigail sends David 200 loaves of bread, 2 jugs of wine, 5 sheep *already prepared*, in addition to a generous portion of grain, raisins, and figs. We also know that while Abigail is gone, Nabal is having a feast in his house, a feast fit for a king (verse 36). I believe the supplies Abigail sends to David come from the very supplies Nabal plans to consume at his feast. Can you imagine his face

as he walks into the pantry and discovers that a good portion of his banquet is missing? Even so, it is apparent that he does not lack anything.

Having sent the food gift on ahead, Abigail works her way down the mountain, out of sight to David and his men. David likewise comes down from higher ground, only he is still grumbling about Nabal's insults and rehearsing what he will do when he gets his hands on this ungrateful despot. Without either party recognizing what is happening, David and Abigail are both converging on each other, and suddenly are face to face with each other.

Wise Words Cool Off a Hothead

(25:23-31)

23 When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David, and bowed herself to the ground. 24 And she fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant. 25 "Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. 26 "Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has restrained you from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies, and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal. 27 "And now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. 28 "Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD, and evil shall not be found in you all your days. 29 "And should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. 30 "And it shall come about when the LORD shall do for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and shall appoint you ruler over Israel, 31 that this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself. When the LORD shall deal well with my lord, then remember your maidservant."

Suddenly the paths of Abigail and David intersect, and Abigail promptly dismounts, falling on her face before David (just as David did before Saul in the last chapter). Everything Abigail does and says conveys her attitude of submission. Six times in this paragraph Abigail speaks of herself as David's

maidservant, and fourteen times she refers to David as **“my lord.”** She begins by pleading with David to place all the blame on her, on her *alone*. Does David plan to avenge himself by killing Nabal and all the males in his household? Abigail pleads with David to take out his anger on her, if he must. In this, Abigail not only attempts to save the life of her husband, but the lives of her household as well.

In addition to offering herself as a scapegoat for David’s wrath, Abigail petitions David to listen to the words she wants to speak to him. In this regard, David is very different from Nabal, who does not listen to anyone (verse 17). To his credit and his gain, David does listen. She begins by pleading with him not to take her husband Nabal seriously. She informs David that she has had no part of Nabal’s decision to insult him and send his servants away empty-handed. The donkeys standing nearby, laden down with supplies, certainly add credence to her statement. She tells David that her husband’s character is aptly depicted by his name, Nabal, which means “fool.”

How can this woman call her husband a “fool” and be looked upon so favourably, as she obviously is in our text? The answer is not that difficult. Her husband is a fool. There is no disputing this. The servant knows it (verse 17) and so does anyone else who knows him. There is good reason for Abigail to call her husband a fool in our text. It may be the thing which keeps him alive. Do you remember when David sought to hide out from Saul in Gath, the home town of Goliath? When he realized his life was in danger there, David pretended to be a lunatic. The king would very easily have killed David, if he thought he was sane. But when he became convinced that David was crazy, he did not kill him, but simply drove him out of town. There is no honour, no status in killing fools. Pretending to be a fool saved David’s life. Calling Nabal a fool may well have saved Nabal’s life.

If Abigail has succeeded in convincing David that killing Nabal will not be worth the effort, she now presses on to show David how taking vengeance will be detrimental to him. She begins by pointing out that the Lord has restrained David from shedding blood and from avenging himself by his own hand (verse 26). Is she referring to this very moment, or is she speaking of the way God kept David from avenging himself against Saul, one chapter earlier? I am not certain on this. But with these words she does indicate that the hand of God is in all of this, that God is restraining David from shedding innocent blood and from avenging himself. She expresses her certainty that if David leaves vengeance to God, God will deal appropriately with Nabal, as with all others who seek evil against David.

Abigail pleads with David to accept the gift she brings and to share it with his men. She begs David to forgive *her* transgression against him, as though all the guilt is hers. Then she comes to her finest moment. Does her husband Nabal reject David as a nobody, a mere trouble-maker? Abigail knows better. She assures David that he will become Israel's king and that his kingdom will last.¹³ David fights *the Lord's battles*, she says, and for this reason, evil shall not be found in him all of his days. If anyone does rise up against David to seek his life, David should know that his life is precious to God. On the other hand, the lives of his enemies are worthless. God will *sling* them out as from the hollow of a *sling*.¹⁴

For Abigail, there is no doubt about it, David is Israel's next king. God's promise to David about this matter will be fulfilled, and God will appoint him ruler over Israel (verse 30). How tragic it would be for David to have a dark cloud over that kingdom, a cloud brought about by his own impetuous acts of seeking vengeance and shedding innocent blood. The Old Testament Law of Moses sets down the principle of justice: **an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth** (see Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21; see also Matthew 5:38). Nabal has insulted David. That is his crime. The males of his household have done no wrong to David or his men so far as we are told. To kill Nabal and the males of his household for being selfish and insulting is to shed innocent blood, because the punishment is worse than the crime.

Abigail assures David that God will bring about all the *good* He has spoken concerning him. If God's plans are for *good*, why is David so intent on doing evil? David's present attitude and actions must not conform to God's will and words. David is a man after God's own heart, so he will eventually regret the very things he is now so intent on doing. David will grieve and have a troubled heart over what he is now setting out to do. As his conscience smites him in the cave in chapter 24, so it will smite him again. Why not end it all here and now by giving up this reckless anger?

One has to wonder whether Abigail has heard any reports about David's encounter with Saul in that nearby cave, as described in the previous chapter. If she has, she uses what she learned here. If not, then God has put words in her mouth which have to cause David to think back to that incident. Abigail is simply urging David to act according to his own standards, his own principles, as he expressed them in chapter 24. Abigail encourages David to deal with Nabal in the same way he dealt with Saul. Leave vengeance to God, and do not shed innocent blood.

When David looks back on this incident and recognizes that Abigail has dealt wisely with him, let him remember her. I do not believe that Abigail realizes all

that she is saying here, or how God will soon bless her by doing away with Nabal and making her the wife of David. Her words sound much like those of Joseph, spoken to Pharaoh's cupbearer in Genesis 40:14-15.

Wisdom's Praise

(25:32-35)

32 Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, 33 and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed, and from avenging myself by my own hand. 34 "Nevertheless, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light *as much as* one male." 35 So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and he said to her, "Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request."

Abigail's words ring true to David. What she says squares with all that God has taught David. He knows she is right, and he now admits it by praising her before all of his men. David recognizes that Abigail is literally a Godsend, and that by means of her words and deeds, God has kept him from wrong doing by taking vengeance against Nabal, and thus shedding innocent blood. Had she not acted quickly, as she did, David would have carried out his plan. She has saved David from folly and guilt, and at the same time spared the life of her husband and every male in her household. Granting her request, David accepts the gift from Abigail and sends her home in peace.

Nabal in the Hands of God

(25:36-38)

36 Then Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. 37 But it came about in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, that his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became *as* a stone. 38 And about ten days later, it happened that the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

Completely oblivious to the stupidity of his actions, and how close he has come to death, Nabal is feasting *like a king* in his house when Abigail returns. He is merry at heart, which probably only happens when he is drunk, as he is now. Wisely, Abigail says nothing to her husband about the day's events at this time. As morning breaks, Nabal awakens with a clearer head, and so Abigail informs

him of all that happened the previous day. The color drains from Nabal's face as he begins to comprehend the magnitude of his folly. He is paralyzed with fear. Our text tells us that **"his heart died within him, so that he became as a stone."** This may mean that he had a heart attack. Ten days later, the Lord strikes Nabal dead. How much better that this fool died at God's hand than at the hand of David.

David and Abigail's Reward

(25:39-44)

39 When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept back His servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head." Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife. 40 When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, "David has sent us to you, to take you as his wife." 41 And she arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord's servants." 42 Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David, and became his wife. 43 David had also taken Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. 44 Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

Word reaches David that Nabal is dead. David responds with wonder and gratitude. He praises God for pleading his cause and removing the reproach of Nabal. He declares that God has indeed kept him from evil. He sees how much better it is to have left vengeance with God. The Lord removed Nabal, not David. That is the way it is supposed to be, and it is all due to the wisdom of a woman, Abigail.

David's messengers arrive at the door of Abigail's home. They have a simple message. It is not quite a proposal of marriage, but more like a summons: "David has sent us to you to take you as his wife." This decisive woman does not have to be asked twice. Quickly she bows to the ground, humbly accepting the offer. She does not look upon herself as David's queen, but as his maidservant, who will happily wash the feet of his servants. She gets up, and accompanied by five of her maidens, follows David's men to his place of hiding, where she becomes his wife.

The final verses of this chapter inform us that Abigail is David's second wife. He has already taken Ahinoam of Jezreel as his wife. Michal was also his wife,

but in the time of his hiding from Saul, the king gave her to Palti, the son of Laish as his wife.

Conclusion

Each of the main characters in this chapter has something to teach us. Let us conclude by looking at the lessons we can learn from Abigail, from Nabal, and from David.

Abigail

Chapter 25 of 1 Samuel 25 seems to begin and end with unrelated incidental editorial comments. In verse 1, we are told that Samuel has died. In verses 43 and 44, we are informed that while David has gained a second wife, he has lost another (Michal). I do not think these are incidental remarks. I believe they are included for a specific purpose. David has suffered the loss of two significant people in his life. Samuel was the prophet of God who anointed him and the one to whom he could flee when pursued by Saul (see 19:18-24). We do not really know that much about Ahinoam, David's first wife. We do know that she was a Jezreelite, and that she was the mother of Amnon (2 Samuel 3:2), the son who raped his sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Michal, however, was the second daughter Saul offered to David as a wife (1 Samuel 18), and there seems to have been a special love between the two, at least at first (18:20-29). To have her given to another man for a wife must have been a hard blow to David.

It is my conclusion that through the sequence of events described in chapter 25, God provides David with a very wise helpmeet, who compensates for the loss of Samuel and Michal. Abigail's words to David virtually echo the prophecies of Samuel concerning David. Abigail's wisdom enables her to be an intimate companion and counsellor to her husband. Her beauty must have gone a long way to soothe the loss of Michal. To alter a biblical expression, "the Lord takes away, and the Lord gives" (see Job 1:21). How marvellous are the Lord's provisions. It is He who deals with Nabal, far better than David. It is He who now gives the widow of Nabal to David, as a woman David can respect and love. God faithfully provides for our needs, at the time He knows we need it.

Abigail is an illustration (if you prefer, a type) of God's provision for man's salvation. Due to the folly of Nabal, Abigail's entire household is in danger. Every male is condemned to death. Unless she does something, they will be killed by David. In wisdom and humility, Abigail steps forward, taking the guilt of all the condemned upon herself, offering herself in their place (see verse 24). Is this not a picture, a prototype of our Lord Jesus Christ? Due to Adam's sin and our own, we have all been condemned to death. *The day of our doom hastens, but the Lord Jesus Christ (who was completely innocent and without*

fault) stepped forward, taking our sin and guilt upon Himself. He offered Himself in our place on the cross of Calvary. He bore the penalty for our sins. And through faith in Him, we can enter into eternal life. And, in Him, we become Christ's bride.

Furthermore, Abigail illustrates the essence of all true submission. No doubt this statement will take you by surprise. How can a woman who refuses to consult with her husband, who acts contrary to his will and his word, and who calls him a fool, possibly be considered a submissive wife? I would suggest that it is only in the externals that Abigail appears to be unsubmissive. She certainly acts independently of her husband. What he refuses to do is exactly what Abigail does. And yet, in heart she is truly submissive. To think that submission is mere blind obedience, or giving in to the will and the wishes of a higher authority falls short of the essence of true submission. *True submission is the active pursuit of the best interests of another, by the subordination of our own personal interests.* True submission is defined in Philippians 2:

1 If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:1-8).

Abigail does not act in a way that seems to promote her own interests. She would be far better off to act like the perfect wife by doing exactly what Nabal wants. Had she simply stayed at home, serving Nabal another drink, she would be “liberated” by David. Her worthless husband would be put to death, and she would be free from his tyranny. Abigail is truly submissive in that she seeks to save her husband (and all the other males in her household). In seeking to save them, she puts her own life on the line. She goes out, alone, to encounter a man who is willing and able to kill her entire household. When she encounters David, she asks that his full anger be spent on her, on her *alone*. She is submissive in that she acts in a way that will benefit her husband, yet at her expense. Doing nothing (and thus appearing to be submissive) will further her interests at her husband's expense.

I want to be very careful in what I am saying, and in what you think I am saying. Most of the time, submission is evidenced by our obedience to the one in higher authority. Most of the time, our submission is evidenced as we seek to bring honour to the one to whom we are subject. But there are times when submission will look like something else. There are times when we must act contrary to the wishes of the one to whom we are in submission. This can only be in matters where God's will is clearly contradictory to the will and wishes of our superior. This can only be when we act in a way that is costly to us, but is truly beneficial to the other.

I am trying to say that this kind of submission – Abigail's kind of submission – is the exception, not the rule. Nevertheless, there are times when we seek to console ourselves for "caving in" to what is wrong by calling it submission. *Godly submission always submits first to God, and secondarily to men in conformity with submission to God. Godly submission always seeks the best interests of the other above our own interests.* And sometimes Godly submission even requires us to act contrary to the will and wishes of the one to whom we are in submission. I have said these things not so that you will throw out your definition of submission, but to expand it. Let us be careful not to turn this into a pretext for our own sin.

Finally, let us learn from Abigail that submission is perhaps the best posture from which to admonish and correct a fellow-believer. Do you notice that Abigail never attempts to correct Nabal in this situation? I would understand that this is because she has sought to reason with him before and has learned that it is unwise to attempt to correct a fool. The servant knew this as well, as his words indicate. But I wish to point out Abigail is not only in submission to her husband, she is also submissive to her future king. How can Abigail submit to God without also submitting to David as the next king? It is ever so clear in our text that Abigail, in a most humble and submissive way, seeks to rebuke and admonish David. At the moment, David is hot-headed and foolish. Her actions and words turn him around. And this takes place through her submission.

Being subject to a person (especially another believer) is no excuse for us to look the other way when we see them acting contrary to the will and the Word of God. All too often I hear people excuse themselves from their brotherly duty to admonish and rebuke another because they are a subordinate to that person. I would suggest that from our text a subordinate attitude and demeanour is the best posture from which to seek to correct another. When we seek to correct "from the top down," it is much more difficult to display humility and godly fear. Let us face up to our responsibility to pursue the best interests of our superiors by rebuking them when required, in a way that continues to demonstrate our humility and submission.

1 Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have *reason for* boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. 5 For each one shall bear his own load (Galatians 6:1-5).

David

I have already pointed out that David errs by looking for his reward for sacrificial ministry in this present age, rather than in eternity. David is willing to minister to Nabal, but only if he feels it is worth it. When he realizes that Nabal has no intention of showing his gratitude, David is ready to seek revenge. Once again, he wants to seek his revenge in this life rather than to leave this matter with God. At this moment in time, David lives for the moment, and not for eternity. The New Testament apostles call upon us to live now in the light of eternity:

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behaviour excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:11-12).

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (1 Peter 4:12-14).

The hall of faith in Hebrews 11 is filled with men and women who lived their earthly lives in the light of God's promises, and thus, the certainty of eternal rewards.

Abraham's life is an example of our fickleness as Christians, of our vacillating faith and obedience. One would think that after the painful consequences of passing off his wife Sarai as his sister in Egypt, he would never do this again. And yet when we read in Genesis 20, we see that Abraham had this deception concerning his wife as a matter of foreign policy, which he did wherever he and Sarai went (20:13). The triumphs of the past are no guarantee of victory in the

future. We must be ever mindful of our fallibility, and ever dependent upon God, through His Word and His Spirit.

David, like all of us, is guilty of failure in the area of “connectivity.” David could see the “connection” between his faith, God’s promises, and his actions toward Saul in that cave (chapter 24). But somehow the same principles that guided David in chapter 24 are completely overlooked in chapter 25. It took the wise words of Abigail to remind David of the “connection” of these truths to Nabal’s insults and folly. I think of the apostles and church leaders in Jerusalem, as described in Acts 10 and 11. They called Peter on the carpet for going to the house of a Gentile and for preaching the gospel to those who gathered there. And then they came to the conclusion that God was actually saving Gentiles, as well as Jews (Acts 11:18). But when they went out, they continued to preach the gospel to Jews only (Acts 11:19). They did not see the “connection” between the lesson God was teaching them and their lives. So it is with each of us.

David is a reminder to us of the marvellous grace God bestows upon us, especially (in this chapter) by His divine interventions which keep us from folly. We know that we are saved by God’s grace alone, apart from any works on our part. We know further that the good things which are evident in our lives are the result of God’s grace. As one little old lady once put it enthusiastically, “It’s all of grace.” It is, and among those things which are of grace is the divine intervention which keeps us from sin and our own folly. I am not saying that God keeps us out of every sin; I am saying that apart from God’s intervention in our daily affairs, there would be a whole lot more sin than there is. If left to himself, David would have really made a mess of things when he attacked Nabal and his household. I wonder how many stupid things we would do if God did not block our path, not unlike the way the angel of God blocked the way of Balaam. Thank God for His interventions!

Finally, we can learn from David’s willingness to learn from a subordinate. David is the man designated to be Israel’s next king. He has with him 600 men, including Abiathar the priest, and even the “**ephod**,” by which God’s will could be discerned. In spite of all these means of divine guidance, David is willing to listen to the words of this woman, Abigail. David may be acting foolishly, but he is at least willing to recognize the wisdom with which Abigail speaks. He listens to her and learns. David seems to understand that truth does not always follow the chain of command. Some will only listen to people in authority over them. They think they cannot learn from a subordinate. Too many husbands fail to listen to the wisdom God may be giving them through their wives, and even through their children. Let us recognize that wisdom and spiritual gifts do not necessarily correspond with one’s office or place in the chain of command. Let us learn to recognize wisdom and to receive it from whatever source God uses.

Nabal

Nabal represents much of what is worst in men. Nabal is arrogant and self-sufficient. He does not recognize that his prosperity comes from God. He judges men by external standards, such as their ancestry and popularity. He does not esteem wisdom and will not listen to those who could spare him much trouble, and even save his life. He does not appreciate his wife and the wisdom God has given to her. He thinks his wealth is the measure of a man, and thus he feels he needs no one beyond himself. He is the man who is completely oblivious to the destruction which lies ahead. Nabal is man at his worst. Nabal is a man desperately in need of grace, but completely confident that he can make it on his own. Nabal cannot and will not recognize God's king when he sees him, and when he is told who he is. Nabal is a man destined for death.

Nabal is the worst of the bunch, and David does not look that good either, except for the ministry of Abigail. Let us all esteem this woman for her wisdom, and give her the honour she deserves:

30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, *But* a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. 31 Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates (Proverbs 31:30-31).

1 Samuel 26:1-25

26. David spares Saul a second time

Verses 1-4. The Ziphites again inform against David

Verses 5-16. Second reprieve of Saul's life

Verses 17-25. Meeting between David and Saul

Experiencing again

(26:1-5)

1 Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding on the hill of Hachilah, *which is* before Jeshimon?" 2 So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having with him three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search for David in the wilderness of Ziph. 3 And Saul camped in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, beside the road, and David was staying in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, 4 David sent out spies, and he knew that Saul was definitely coming. 5 David then arose and came to the place

where Saul had camped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; and Saul was lying in the circle of the camp, and the people were camped around him.

We have met the Ziphites before. In chapter 23, we are told that the Ziphites went up to Saul at his home in Gibeah, informing him of David's whereabouts and promising to deliver him over to the king (23:19-20). Saul wanted to be certain not to let David slip through his fingers, and so he sent the Ziphite delegation home, with instructions to identify all of David's hiding places so they would be certain of his capture on his next campaign (23:21-23). They returned home, and Saul soon came in hot pursuit of David. When David learned of Saul's coming, he moved further south, where he was nearly trapped by Saul on a mountain in the wilderness of Maon. Had it not been for the timely arrival of a messenger with the report that the Philistines had attacked Israel, Saul would have captured David (23:24-29).

After Saul returned from following the Philistines, he resumed his pursuit of David. Saul just happened to pause for a rest stop at the very cave in which David and his men were hiding. While Saul was in the cave, David secretly cut off a portion of Saul's robe, but he would not allow anyone to harm Saul. He then presented himself to Saul, demonstrating his innocence by showing the portion of the king's robe he had just cut off inside the cave. Saul "repented" for the moment, and the two men parted peacefully (chapter 24). It was here that David publicly embraced the position that it would be wrong for him (or anyone else) to remove Saul by harming him, since this would be opposing God's anointed. David would not harm his king; he would only seek his good.

In chapter 25, we see that the commitment David made regarding Saul's well being was not one he was willing to extend to Nabal. David sent a delegation of ten men to ask Nabal for a contribution of food because he was celebrating at sheep-sheering time. Nabal rudely refused, withholding any food, and adding insult to injury by heaping insults upon David and his followers. David was so incensed that he set out to kill Nabal and every male in his household. Through the wise intervention of Abigail, Nabal's wife, David spared Nabal's life temporarily, and thus was restrained from acting foolishly. In her appeal to David, Abigail reminded him of the very principles he embraced in chapter 24.

Now, once again, we find the Ziphites betraying David to Saul. When the Ziphites come to Saul, he is not in the wilderness of Ziph, threatening the lives of those who would withhold information about David's whereabouts. He is at home in Gibeah, having given up the pursuit of David, at least for a time. But with the arrival of these helpful informers, Saul is once again prompted to pursue David.¹²⁴ These Ziphites, descendants of Caleb and thus of Judah, are

fellow-Judahites with David, and yet they betray their future king to a Benjamite like Saul.

Saul returns to the wilderness of Ziph, accompanied by 3,000 of his best soldiers. This time he does not intend to let David get away. Saul pitches camp on the hill of Hachilah, close to the road. David remains in the more remote part of the wilderness. This time things are going to be a lot different than the last time these two men met in this place. The first time David was seeking to retreat, while Saul was advancing. Now it is Saul whose soldiers are camped and David who is taking the initiative. David's spies locate Saul's camp and inform David, who approaches with his men. David looks down on Saul's camp and sees Saul asleep in the centre of the camp, easily identified by his size, his armor or apparel, and most certainly by his spear. Next to Saul lies his uncle and commander of the army, Abner. From Saul and Abner in the center radiate his 3,000 soldiers, looking something like the concentric ripples when a rock is thrown into a calm pool of water.

An Invitation and One Volunteer

(26:6-12)

6 Then David answered and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." 7 So David and Abishai came to the people by night, and behold, Saul lay sleeping inside the circle of the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the people were lying around him. 8 Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time." 9 But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD'S anointed and be without guilt?" 10 David also said, "As the LORD lives, surely the LORD will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. 11 "The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go." 12 So David took the spear and the jug of water from *beside* Saul's head, and they went away, but no one saw or knew *it*, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a sound sleep from the LORD had fallen on them.

David's scouts locate Saul's camp, and accompanied by at least two men, David goes to the campsite.¹²⁵ Two men seem to be near David, Ahimelech the Hittite (not to be confused with Ahimelech the priest, who was killed by Saul) and

Abishai the son of Zeruiah, who was the brother of Joab and Asahel (2 Samuel 2:18). David speaks to these two men, requesting that one of them go with him down to Saul's camp. Ahimelech appears to remain silent, while Abishai volunteers.

Imagine for the moment that you are Abishai. Saul has carefully positioned himself at the innermost part of the circle of his troops. Abner, a heroic warrior and Saul's body guard, is lying right next to the king. You carefully pick your way through this maze of human bodies, fearing that at any moment someone will awaken. It seems impossible that someone among these 3,000 men is not on watch. You hear a soldier snoring very loudly and wonder if you should turn him on his side, lest he wake up the others. You step on a stick, and it snaps -- your heart nearly stops. You can hardly believe you have actually made it as you stand there with David, looking down at Saul sleeping peacefully, with Abner close by. Close to Saul's head is his spear, thrust into the ground, and his water container.¹²⁶

If you are Abishai, it would not take long to figure out what should come next. Knowing from the incident in the cave that David is squeamish about killing Saul, Abishai whispers to David, "God has delivered Saul into your hand today. Now, then, let me finish Saul off with his own spear. It will only take one blow, I assure you." Abishai reasons: "True, David refused to kill Saul in the cave, but he surely has learned his lesson by now. If David is reluctant to do it, I will. Surely David did not ask for volunteers to come down here with him, only to look at the king and then leave." What an interesting debate it must have been between David and Abishai, as they strongly disagree, yet desperately try to keep from waking up Saul or any of his men.

David forbids Abishai to kill Saul for essentially the same reasons he verbalized in the cave in chapter 24. No one can lift his hand against the Lord's anointed without incurring guilt.¹²⁷ In verse 10, David goes beyond what he has said before. "As surely as God lives, He will be the one to remove Saul," David assures Abishai. David does not know how, but after his experience with Nabal and Abigail, he knows that God can accomplish His will in any number of ways. He could strike Saul dead, Saul could die naturally, or he might be killed in battle. These are just some of the ways God could remove Saul, but in each case, it will not be by David's hand, nor by the hand of any of his men.

David has come for Saul's spear and water container, and that is all. So he takes up Saul's spear and water jug, instructing Abishai to come along with him. I can see Abishai shaking his head as they make their way back through that maze of bodies surrounding Saul and finally slip into the safety of darkness. "That was a suicide mission! All that only to take a spear and a water jug." Whether they

knew it or not, the author of our text informs us that this was not just a stroke of good luck, or even a good military maneuver. God had miraculously put these 3,000 men to sleep. David and Abishai could have been yelling at each another (Is it possible they were?), and no one would have awakened. Abishai could have stumbled and fallen upon a couple of these soldiers, and they still would have been safe. I wonder how many times in history men have assumed they had a really close call, or they did a spectacular job at some task, without ever knowing that behind it all was the hand of God.

A Rude Awakening

(26:13-16)

13 Then David crossed over to the other side, and stood on top of the mountain at a distance *with* a large area between them. 14 And David called to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, “Will you not answer, Abner?” Then Abner answered and said, “Who are you who calls to the king?” 15 So David said to Abner, “Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord. 16 “This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, *all* of you must surely die, because you did not guard your lord, the LORD'S anointed. And now, see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was at his head.”

David's mama raised no fool. David waits to call out until he has crossed over what seems to be a valley. Then, standing far from Saul's reach on top of a mountain, David cries out to the people in general and to Abner in particular. It is probably still in the dark of night, or in the dimly lit early morning hours. The soldiers of Saul are apparently awakened by the sound of David's voice. Not seeing who is calling out, Abner does not recognize David's voice.

There is a reason David cries out to the soldiers and to Abner in particular. David indicts the entire group for not properly protecting their king. And for this, David insists that their failure should cost them their lives. As we read David's words to Abner and the others, we begin to grasp the reasons behind David's perplexing invasion of Saul's camp. David did not go down to Saul's camp frivolously, as a kind of spur-of-the-moment prank. He had a plan, which had worked out just as he had expected. When David asked for a volunteer, Abishai stepped forward, just as I suspect David anticipated. You see, Abishai was a mighty man of valor as described in 2 Samuel 23:18-19:

18 And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of the thirty. And he swung his spear against three hundred and killed *them*, and had a name as well as the three. 19 He was most honored of the thirty,

therefore he became their commander; however, he did not attain to the three.

Abishai is a stouthearted soldier, a man who has no qualms about taking the life of another. David took Abishai along with him, knowing full well that he would want to kill Saul when they reached him in his camp.

Those to whom David call out are soldiers. They are there to arrest David, whom some represented as a dangerous outlaw, determined to gain the throne by killing Saul. If this were the case (or even if it were not) they are Saul's secret servicemen. David informs them they have failed their most important duty – protecting their king. David claims a would-be *killer* successfully penetrated their defenses and reached their king, fully intending to do him harm. Only because David stopped him (i.e., Abishai) is the king still breathing. David is right! While David did not approach Saul to kill him, this was surely Abishai's intention. The only reason Abishai did not kill King Saul was that David stopped him. If any doubted one had come this close to Saul, look for the king's spear and water jug. Imagine the dismay, especially for Abner, when they look at the ground, inches from Saul's head, and see the hole where the head of the spear has been and the missing water jug, and perhaps a pair of footprints leading to the spear and back. David invites Saul's security force to send a man up to him to retrieve the missing items. David has the spear, and he has made his point.

In truth, David saved the king's life. As commander-in-chief of Saul's forces, Abner is responsible for this serious breach of security which endangered the life of the king. Abner is the man in charge. It was on his watch, so to speak, that Saul's life was endangered. And it was Abner who lay next to the king, within easy reach of the one who would have killed the king. Abner is the most renowned soldier in Saul's army. What a blemish this incident puts on his record! But it is much worse than this, for failing to protect the king is a crime punishable by death. In this instance, not only Abner, but every one of the 3,000 soldiers is guilty of a most unpardonable sin.

Someone told me of a news story they heard on the radio. Apparently there was an attempt on the life of Saddam Hussein's son. His son was not killed, but for failing to protect him properly, all of the security men were executed. David is not speaking idle words, and every soldier standing near Saul must wonder what the king's response will be.

David Speaks With Saul

(26:17-20)

17 Then Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord the king." 18 He also said, "Why then is my lord pursuing his servant? For what have I done? Or what evil is in my hand? 19 "Now therefore, please let my lord the king listen to the words of his servant. If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering; but if it is men, cursed are they before the LORD, for they have driven me out today that I should have no attachment with the inheritance of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' 20 "Now then, do not let my blood fall to the ground away from the presence of the LORD; for the king of Israel has come out to search for a single flea, just as one hunts a partridge in the mountains."

Saul slowly comes to his senses, groggy no doubt from his supernatural slumber. He overhears the conversation between Abner and a distant voice. Saul knows that voice; it is the voice of none other than David. He has already heard enough to soften him. **"Is this your voice, my son David?"**¹²⁸ David acknowledges that it is indeed he. From here, David takes the lead, inquiring of Saul why he is pursuing him once again. He asks Saul what evil deed he has done to necessitate such action on Saul's part. There is, of course, no good answer.

What follows is even more intriguing. David pleads with Saul to listen to his words and to consider what he is about to say. It is wrong for Saul to seek to kill David, for he has done his king no wrong. Indeed, he has just saved the king's life. But having pointed this out, David pursues the matter more deeply, in terms of its theological implications. In verses 19 and 20, God is prominent, and so are the spiritual consequences of Saul's pursuit of David.

Saul obviously believes that David is guilty of some wrongdoing so that he needs to be hunted down and eliminated. David shows that there can be only two sources from which Saul could arrive at such a conclusion. On the one hand, it is possible that David has truly sinned, and that the Lord has stirred Saul up to deal with this evil. If this is the case, Saul need only tell David what his sin is, and then David can obtain atonement for this sin by offering a sacrifice, which God will find acceptable. If this is the case, there is no need for Saul to pursue and punish David, since God has forgiven him.

There is yet another possibility. If David is innocent, then there must be those who have wrongly accused David before Saul by characterizing him as a dangerous criminal, worthy of death. If this second possibility is true, then such

false accusers are under a curse before the Lord. It is not David who is worthy of death, but those who have wrongly accused David before Saul.

15 He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD (Proverbs 17:15).

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20).

The sin of such men goes even beyond making false accusations against David. In provoking Saul to pursue David, they have forced an innocent man to flee from his country. It is they, aided by Saul, who have driven David out of Israel. The spiritual implications of this are immense. To leave the country, as David has had to do, is to **“have no attachment with the inheritance of the Lord”** (verse 19). To force a true Israelite to leave this land is to so much as say, **“Go, serve other gods”** (verse 19).

This is a very significant point, but one much harder for us to grasp than for an Old Testament Israelite like David. Let me attempt to explain. When God created the world and mankind, He put Adam and Eve in a special place, the Garden of Eden. It was here that He fellowshiped with them. When they sinned, they were driven out of this place of fellowship and blessing. When God chose Abraham, He set apart a man whom He would bless, and whose descendants He would bless as well. But He also set aside a place of blessing. It was to this place of blessing that Abraham was instructed to go, leaving his homeland and family behind. God also chose the land of Israel as the place where He would dwell in a special way.

When Jacob deceived his brother Esau, he was virtually forced to leave this special place, Israel. As he was leaving Israel (or what became the land of Israel), headed for Paddan-aram, God gave Jacob a dream:

12 And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 “Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 “And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said,

“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” 17 And he was afraid and said, **“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”** 18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, 21 and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. 22 “And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee” (Genesis 28:12-22, emphasis mine).

In this dream, God communicated a very important message to Jacob. The message was that Canaan was a very special place; it was the place where heaven and earth intersected, it was the place where God dwelt in a special way. It was a message that motivated Jacob to return to this place and not stay in Paddan-aram. Just as God chose a certain people, among whom He would dwell, God chose a certain place where He would dwell. It is because of this that Jacob was buried in the promised land, even though he died in Egypt (Genesis 47:27-31; 49:29-33). Joseph, likewise, instructed that his bones be taken to this land when the nation Israel returned (Genesis 50:22-26; Exodus 13:19).

When the Israelites were ready to enter the promised land, God made it very clear to them that they were to worship Him only at the designated place in the promised land:

5 “But you shall seek *the LORD* at the place which the LORD your God shall choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. 6 “And there you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the first-born of your herd and of your flock. 7 “There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you. 8 “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man *doing* whatever is right in his own eyes; 9 for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. 10 “When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around *you* so that you live in security, 11 then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God shall choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and

the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD. 12 “And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. 13 “Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every *cultic* place you see, 14 but in the place which the LORD chooses in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you” (Deuteronomy 12:5-14).

To force David to flee from the land of Israel was to force him to flee from the place where God dwelt in a special way; it was to force him to leave the place where God had provided for men to worship Him. Thus, to force one to flee from Israel was as much as to say, **“Go, serve other gods.”** Do you remember the story of Ruth? In the Book of Ruth, Naomi and her husband left Israel during a time of famine and went to the land of Moab. When her husband and two sons died, Naomi decided to return to the land of Israel. Her two daughters-in-law were Moabites. Naomi fully intended to leave these two women in their own land, while she went on alone to Israel. Notice what Naomi tells them, and how Ruth responds:

12 “Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me. “ 14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 Then she said, **“Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”** 16 But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you *or* turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God. 17 “Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me” (Ruth 1:12-17, emphasis mine).

In effect, by urging her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab rather than return to Israel with her, she was urging them to serve other gods. To leave Israel is to leave the land where one can worship God (because of His special presence there, particularly in conjunction with the ark of God and eventually the temple).

In the Book of 2 Kings, we read of the healing and conversion of Naaman, the Syrian. When Naaman was about to return to his own country, he made a very unusual request of the prophet Elisha:

17 And Naaman said, “If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules' load of earth; for your servant will no more offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD” (2 Kings 5:17).

Naaman realized that the God of Israel was the only true God. He also recognized that He dwelt in a special way in Israel, and that He was to be worshipped there. What was Naaman to do? He asked for some Israelite soil to take back to Syria with him, so that He could worship the God of Israel on Israelite soil.¹²⁹

Later in Israel's history, God would send His people into captivity, outside the land. This was a devastating blow, as can be seen by one of the Psalms written during the Jewish captivity in Babylon:

1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion. 2 Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps. 3 For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, *saying*, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” 4 How can we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land? 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, May my right hand forget *her skill*. 6 May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, If I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy (Psalm 137:1-6).

David fled to Gath in Philistia (21:10-15) and then to Moab (22:3-4). I believe David was outside the land of Israel when the prophet Gad appeared to him, instructing him to leave the stronghold and to return to the land of Judah (22:5). We are not told why in that text, and I am inclined to think that David was not told either. But now I think he has figured it out. David has grasped a very important truth – that Israel is the special place in which God has chosen to dwell in a special way, and where He can be worshipped. It is indeed, the place where heaven and earth meet, just as in Jacob's dream. David has also grasped the implications of this truth as it applies to his pursuit by Saul and his men, forcing him to flee the country. Those who have incited Saul against David have forced him to flee the country, and thus may might as well have said to him, **“Go, serve other gods.”** This is a crime worthy of death:

6 “If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, 7 of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near

you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), 8 you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. 9 “But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. 10 “So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 11 “Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you” (Deuteronomy 13:6-11; see also verses 12-18).

This accusing and pursuing of David is indeed a most serious matter. It is wrong because David is innocent. Those who pursue David have now placed themselves in a most dangerous position. On whose side do these men suppose God is? David has been able to come and go in their camp. He is able to reach Saul’s side and take his spear, without any resistance. If he had chosen to do so, he could have killed Saul. And yet it is David who saves the king’s life, and not the king’s own men. They have failed to protect their king! They, not David, are worthy of death. And since all these soldiers of Saul have failed to protect their king, they are guilty of a capital offense. They deserve to die. Not only do they deserve to die at the hand of Saul, they deserve to die at the hand of God. By accusing David and forcing him to flee the country, they are promoting the worship of false gods. They are condemned men. They are in a lot of trouble, with their king and with their God. This incident shows that it is not David whose life is in danger as much as those who pursue him, or who falsely accuse him to their king. Those guilty of this sin seem to be present on this very night. Saul’s spear is not thrust that night, but David’s words pierce the very heart of every man.

In verse 20, David pleads with Saul that his blood not be shed outside of the land, away from the presence of the Lord. There is no need for Saul to pursue him so vigorously. Searching for David is like searching for a single flea, like hunting a partridge in the mountains. It is a whole lot of work with very little benefit. It is a futile, if not a dangerous, task. Let the king forsake his pursuit and cease listening to those who pit him against David.

Saul Speaks

(26:21-25)

21 Then Saul said, “I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error.” 22 And David answered and said, “Behold the spear of the king! Now let one of the young men come over and take it. 23 “And the LORD will repay

each man *for* his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD delivered you into *my* hand today, but I refused to stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed. 24 "Now behold, as your life was highly valued in my sight this day, so may my life be highly valued in the sight of the LORD, and may He deliver me from all distress." 25 Then Saul said to David, "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail." So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

David does not use Saul's spear against him, but Saul gets the point. Saul recognizes his own sin in his dealings with David. But the most significant word is "**return**". Has Saul been a part of the sin of driving David out of the land, away from the opportunity to worship his God? Then he would now confess his sin, and give up his pursuit of David so that he may safely "**return**" to the place of worship. Because David regards Saul's life as precious, Saul promises to regard David's life as precious. Saul confesses that he has sinned, and that in his sin, he has been guilty of the very serious error to which David refers.

In response to Saul's confession and promise of amnesty, David shouts, "**Behold the spear of the king! Now let one of the young men come over and take it.**" It does appear, as some have observed, that the spear was a symbol of authority in the ancient world.¹³⁰ David does not presume to keep the symbol of authority that belongs to Saul, and so he calls for one of Saul's men to fetch it.

Would some say David is a sinner, a traitor, and an enemy of Saul? David concludes his defence by asserting his righteousness in verses 23 and 24. It is the Lord who will repay each person for his righteousness and faithfulness, David reminds his pursuers. This He does individually ("**each man**"). Although the Lord delivers Saul into David's hand, David does him no harm, because he is the Lord's anointed. David therefore looks to the Lord to reward him for his deeds this night.

While Saul and his men put themselves in jeopardy by accusing and pursuing David as a sinner and a criminal, David is assured that his life is safe in the hands of his God. As David has highly valued the life of Saul, he knows that God will highly value his life, and thus he is assured God will indeed deliver him from all his distresses (verse 24).

Saul's final words are a pronouncement of blessing on David, with the assurance that he will accomplish great things and that, in the end, David will prevail (verse 25). With these words, the two men part company for the last time. They shall not meet again because the time of Saul's death draws near. Saul returns to his place, but David goes on his way. David knows better than to think Saul's repentance will last.

Conclusion

There is a message here to those, like Saul and his men, who wrongly accused David. God defends His own. There is no way that God's anointed can be removed before God's time. This was true of Saul; it was also true of David. God defends the innocent, and He will bring about justice for the afflicted. In this brief period of time, God turned the tables on the enemies of David. It was not David who was in grave danger, but those who opposed him. Let the enemies of God's chosen ones take note, and let His chosen ones take courage.

For David, the events of this chapter are a high water mark for David's grasp of God's truth, and for the application of it in his life. David stood tall outside that cave in chapter 24, but he stands even taller here in chapter 26. He is confident of God's protection and care, and of Him as the one who will reward his righteousness and judge his accusers. If in chapter 24 we see David gently rebuking his king, in chapter 26 we see him rebuking those who have set the king against him. David now sees his flight from his enemies in terms of its spiritual implications.

If David has grown spiritually after the events of chapter 24, and this growth is evident in chapter 26, we must conclude that Abigail plays a significant role in this. The things David affirms as true in chapter 26 are the very things about which Abigail assures him. If David has any doubt that he will become the next king, Abigail assures him he will reign over Israel (25:30). Though David wants to take vengeance on his enemies (i.e. Nabal), Abigail reminds him that God will better handle such matters, and that leaving this to God will keep David from any regrets (25:31). Does David fear for his life? Abigail assures him that his life is safely in God's hands (25:29). It is said that behind many great men, there is a great woman. Certainly that was true of David and Abigail.

Do some scholars agonize that chapter 26 is too similar to chapter 24? It is similar, because it is a kind of replay of chapter 24. When God wants to teach us a lesson, if we fail to learn that lesson through one experience, God will continue to bring experiences our way which confront us with the same basic test. I think the reason there is a second incident in chapter 26, so similar to the one described in chapter 24, is that God wanted David to retake the same test so that he received a higher score.

Years ago I remember talking with a friend who was going through some problems in his life. As we talked, my friend mentioned that in addition to his current problems, he had faced many problems before. As I probed with a few questions, it became apparent that in each situation, the problems and the issues were very much alike. I then asked my friend, "Has it ever occurred to you that God keeps bringing you back to the same problem because you have not yet

dealt with it as you should?” He acknowledged that this was probably the case. I think maybe it was also with David, and it may be the same for us. When we fail to deal with certain matters as we should, God persists at giving us further opportunities to do it right.

Finally, I believe there is something for us to learn about the “place of blessing” for Christians today. For the Old Testament saint, as we have seen, dwelling in the land of Israel was a privilege and a source of blessing. Here, one could offer sacrifices and worship God freely and fully. Elsewhere, God could be worshipped and served, but with certain restrictions. One could, of course, be in the land and still distant from God due to unbelief and disobedience. And, one could be in a distant land and still have an intimate walk with God. But ideally, living in the land of Israel was to be in the place of God’s presence and blessing.

What does that mean for us who are New Testament Christians, who live far from the promised land? The answer of the New Testament is very clear on this matter. In John 1, Jesus presents Himself as Israel’s Messiah. Jesus calls Philip to follow Him, and Philip then finds Nathaniel, telling him that the promised Messiah has come and that He is Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:43-44). When Nathaniel comes to Jesus, the Lord tells him, **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you”** (1:48). Nathaniel is convinced and says to Jesus, **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel”** (1:49). Our Lord’s words to Nathaniel are incredible:

50 Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.” 51 And He said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:50-51).

With these words, Jesus takes Nathaniel, and us, all the way back to Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28. In this dream, Jacob sees angels ascending and descending upon a ladder that goes to heaven, but rests on the earth. Jacob is most impressed with where the ladder stands – in Israel – and with the special nature of this place as the dwelling place of God. Jesus now takes up this imagery as He speaks to Nathaniel. Nathaniel has just objected to Peter’s assessment of Jesus, based solely on the place Jesus has come from – Nazareth (John 1:46). Jesus now informs Nathaniel that while he is concerned about the place where the ladder was resting, Jesus is the ladder! *The place is important, but the Person of Jesus is even more important.* It is Jesus Christ whom God appointed as the means to join heaven and earth, to provide men with an access to heaven. It was not Israel, the place, but Israel, the person, who would save men from their sins and lead them to heaven.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we read of the birth of our Lord Jesus, and then of the flight of Joseph and Mary and the child to Egypt. After the death of Herod, Joseph brings his family back to the land of Israel. When he does so, Matthew writes,

14 And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, “OUT OF EGYPT DID I CALL MY SON” (Matthew 2:14-15).

These words, “**OUT OF EGYPT DID I CALL MY SON,**” are found in Hosea 11:1. They refer to the fact that God brought Israel, His “**son**” (see Exodus 4:22-23) out of Egypt. Now, by inspiration, Matthew applies them to the baby Jesus. Just as Israel was God’s “**son**,” whom He brought out of Egypt, so the baby Jesus is God’s “**Son**,” whom He also brought up from Egypt. In one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, God has summed up all of Israel, and all of Israel’s hopes. Israel is the place where God meets with men, but Jesus is the “**Son**,” the person by whom God saves men. Israel is the place where the person of the Messiah came. And now that He has come, it is He that is to be preeminent, and not the place.

When Jesus meets with the Samaritan woman, the matter of the “**place**” to worship God arises. I want you to take special note of what the woman says to Jesus and what our Lord says in response to her:

19 The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. 22 “You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” 25 The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” 26 Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am *He*” (John 4:19-26).

The Samaritan woman knows well the differences between the Samaritans and the Jews over the proper place of worship. She brings this matter up in her discussion with Jesus. But Jesus does not talk with her about the “proper place” at all. He tells her that the issue of worship now centers on a Person, not a place. Those who would worship God “**in Spirit and in truth**” need to worship God

through the coming Messiah. With this the woman agrees, but she mistakenly assumes He has not yet come. Jesus tells her, **“I . . . am He.”** *Those who would worship God must worship Him through Jesus Christ. Worship is therefore no longer a matter of being in the right place, but of worshipping by means of the right Person.*

Since the coming of Jesus Christ, Israel’s Messiah, worshipping God is no longer a matter of being in the right place, but of being in the right Person. In John 15, Jesus speaks to His disciples about abiding in Him in terms of a branch abiding in a vine. In chapters 14 and 16, Jesus speaks to His disciples about the Holy Spirit who is to come. By means of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ promises to abide in every true believer. And so it is in the New Testament epistles that we find salvation, sanctification, and spiritual blessing described as the result of being **“in Christ.”**

23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is **in Christ** Jesus (Romans 3:23-24, emphasis mine).

11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God **in Christ** Jesus (Romans 6:11, emphasis mine).

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life **in Christ** Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23, emphasis mine).

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ** Jesus (Romans 8:1, emphasis mine).

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is **in Christ** Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified **in Christ** Jesus, . saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours (1 Corinthians 1:2, emphasis mine).

4 I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you **in Christ** Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:4, emphasis mine).

30 But by His doing you are **in Christ** Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30, emphasis mine).

22 For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ** all shall be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22, emphasis mine).

14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph **in Christ**, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place (2 Corinthians 2:14, emphasis mine).

17 Therefore if any man is **in Christ**, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17, emphasis mine).

4 But *it was* because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have **in Christ** Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage (Galatians 2:4).

I end this message on a bitter-sweet note. My friend and fellow-elder, Lee Crandell, died during the week after I preached this message. I remember his last words to me. He remarked how much he liked this message, and especially the application. I know what he meant. Lee loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and he loved hearing and proclaiming the message of the Gospel. He knew what it meant to be **“in Christ.”** Lee died, **“in Christ”**. What a comfort:

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; **and the dead in Christ shall rise first.** 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, emphasis mine).

To be **“in Christ”** is to be forgiven of your sins. To be **“in Christ”** is to be a new creation, to have old things pass away, and all things to become new. To be **“in Christ”** is to have eternal life. To be **“in Christ”** is to be assured of resurrection from the dead, to spend eternity in the presence of Jesus Christ. My friend, Lee, was **“in Christ.”** If he were here today, he would ask you a simple question, “Are you **‘in Christ’?**” Being saved, being a Christian, being assured of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, is not a matter of being in the right place, but of *being in the right Person. The way to be “in Christ” is to acknowledge your sin against God, and to trust in Jesus Christ alone as the*

means God has provided for your salvation. By faith in Him, His suffering and death pays the penalty for your sins. By His righteousness and resurrection from the dead, you are made righteous and raised to newness of life. If you have never trusted in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ on your behalf, I urge you to do so this very moment. To be “in Christ” is to be in God’s appointed place of salvation and blessing forever.

27. David’s lapse of faith

Verses 1-7. Unbelief and discouragement

Verses 8-12. Deceit and deception.

1 Samuel 27:1-28:2

Better in Gath than in the Grave

(27:1-4)

1 Then David said to himself, “Now I will perish one day¹³³ by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand.” 2 So David arose and crossed over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. 3 And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each with his household, *even* David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal’s widow. 4 Now it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he no longer searched for him.

The “**then**” of verse 1 seems to suggest a fairly close proximity between the events of chapter 26 and those of chapter 27. No significant span of time is indicated, and neither are any crisis situations described which would explain David’s sudden change of heart.¹³⁴ David, who was so confident that God would protect his life (24:15) and who has been assured of this by Abigail (25:29), now speaks of his death as a certainty if he does not flee to the land of the Philistines where he is assured of his safety (27:1). David, who in the previous chapter said it was Saul who would perish (26:10),¹³⁵ now says it is he who will perish. And David, who pleads with Saul that he not be *forced* to leave the land, now feels compelled to leave even though Saul has given him some assurance of safety. This is most amazing.

The word David employs here (rendered “**perish**” by the NASB) is significant, especially since David should have known the Law of Moses. The word is employed some 18 times from Genesis to Judges – that is, until David employs

it in 26:10 and 27:1. Three of those times it is used to refer to God's judgment on Israel's enemies. Eleven times it refers to God's judgment on Israel as His enemy, for disobeying Him and disregarding His Law. Is it not interesting that David, who has just spoken of himself as innocent and of others as guilty, now uses this term to express his fear that Saul will destroy him? David has really lost it here. Dale Ralph Davis writes that, "... the thinking that led David to this move points to one of faith's fainting fits (as H. L. Ellison calls them):

'Then David said to his heart: 'Now I am going to be swept away one day by the hand of Saul; I have no good (here), but I must escape to the land of the Philistines – Saul shall despair of me, of searching any more for me in all the territory of Israel; so I shall escape from his hand.' [27:1]"¹³⁵

It has not been that long ago since David sought sanctuary in Gath the first time. That was a miserable disaster for David. He did survive, but he was driven out as a scribbling, slobbering lunatic. One would have thought that as David left the gates of Gath, he would have muttered to himself, "I'll never do *that* again!" And yet, here he is, but this time he is not alone. This time, David has his 600 followers, plus all their wives and families (27:2-3).¹³⁶ David's two wives are with him as well.¹³⁷

David is right about one thing. When Saul hears that David has fled to Gath, he no longer searches for him. Does this mean Saul would have tried to hunt David down had he remained in Israelite territory? It isn't really surprising that Saul would not seek to capture David in Philistine territory. After all, he was never really aggressive in fighting Philistines anyway. It was his son Jonathan who was aggressive in this matter. Being "right" about Saul giving up does not mean that David is right in fleeing to Philistine territory, however, as I think the author makes clear.

A Place of His Own

(27:5-7)

5 Then David said to Achish, "If now I have found favor in your sight, let them give me a place in one of the cities in the country, that I may live there; for why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" 6 So Achish gave him Ziklag that day; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. 7 And the number of days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

You can imagine that David, his 600 fighting men and all their families, must have made quite an impact on Gath. It is not out of consideration for Achish or Gath that David makes a request of the king, however. David approaches Achish

with a request. He asks if he can be given a city where he and his followers and families can live that is not under foot. It seems a reasonable request, and so Achish gives David the city of Ziklag. This city is 25 miles or so to the south and east of Gath. It is somewhat out of the way, from a Philistine perspective, and not all that distant from Israelite cities. It gives David and his followers a “place of their own,” in an area where David’s activities will not be monitored by Achish. It is something like moving far enough away from your in-laws to have a life of your own. David dwelt in Philistia a year and four months, but the town of Ziklag becomes a permanent possession of the Israelite kings (verses 6-7).

Pulling the Wool Over Achish’s Eyes

(27:8-12)

8 Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites and the Girzites and the Amalekites; for they were the inhabitants of the land from ancient times, as you come to Shur even as far as the land of Egypt. 9 And David attacked the land and did not leave a man or a woman alive, and he took away the sheep, the cattle, the donkeys, the camels, and the clothing. Then he returned and came to Achish. 10 Now Achish said, “Where have you made a raid today?” And David said, “Against the Negev of Judah and against the Negev of the Jerahmeelites and against the Negev of the Kenites.” 11 And David did not leave a man or a woman alive, to bring to Gath, saying, “Lest they should tell about us, saying, ‘So has David done and so *has been* his practice all the time he has lived in the country of the Philistines.’” 12 So Achish believed David, saying, “He has surely made himself odious among his people Israel; therefore he will become my servant forever.”

David and his men are given a place in which to live. They also need a means of livelihood. David’s solution to this problem is indeed ingenious. David uses Ziklag as his headquarters, his base of operations. From here, David and his men go about the area raiding the cities and camps of Israel’s enemies. We know some of these people, such as the Amalekites. But of others, like the Girzites, we know nothing. We do know in a generic sort of way that these are the peoples who inhabited the land from ancient times. It may be safe, therefore, to conclude that all of these peoples are “Canaanites,” who are under the ban (see Exodus 23:23; Numbers 21:3; Deuteronomy 7:1-5; Judges 1:17).

If this is the case (we may have a small element of doubt in the case of the Girzites, for example), then the wholesale slaughter of these “Canaanites” seems justified. I must point out, however, that although David kills all of the people whose villages he raids, including children, he does not kill all of the cattle. He

“took away the sheep, the cattle, the donkeys, the camels, and the clothing” (verse 9). If David is attacking these peoples in order to obey God’s command, then he is no more obedient than Saul, who left only the king and the best of the cattle alive. It seems, therefore, that David attacks these peoples for more pragmatic reasons, such as providing food for their families. He kills all the people, leaving no survivors, not because this is God’s command, but because it is the only way he can continue his deception (see verse 11).

David may be doing the right thing (i.e., annihilating those God put under the ban), but for all the wrong reasons. God often accomplishes His will by means of self-serving men who only unwittingly do what God has purposed. This was true of Joseph’s brothers (see Genesis 50:20), and it seems so with David in Philistine territory.

David may not be wise in fleeing to the Philistines for safety, but he is certainly cunning and clever. King Achish may think himself to be shrewd, but I am inclined to think he is nave and gullible.¹³⁸ David comes to this Philistine as a “defector,” whom Achish is inclined to view as a real prize, a real “feather in his cap.” David’s presence among the Philistines looks like a real asset to Achish. After all, from all appearances David is fighting for the Philistines against the Israelites (27:10). This must mean the Israelites would never take David back, and certainly not as their king (compare 21:11; 27:12). Rather than consuming the resources of Achish, David is a contributor. After every raid, David seems to come to Achish to report and give a portion of the spoils (27:9). Achish thinks he has David in the palm of his hand and that he can continue to “use” him to his own advantage.

Achish is not very perceptive. David is not really killing off Israelites at all, but the enemies of Israel, and all from his sanctuary in Ziklag. While we are not told so in this text, it will not be long before we are told that David shares some of the spoils of war with the very people he is supposed to be killing – his kinsmen:

26 Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent *some* of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, “Behold, a gift for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD: 27 to those who were in Bethel, and to those who were in Ramoth of the Negev, and to those who were in Jattir, 28 and to those who were in Aroer, and to those who were in Siphmoth, and to those who were in Eshtemoa, 29 and to those who were in Racal, and to those who were in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to those who were in the cities of the Kenites, 30 and to those who were in Hormah, and to those who were in Bor-ashan, and to those who were in Athach, 31 and to those who were in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to go” (1 Samuel 30:26-31).

Do you see the dramatic contrast between the way David represents his activities to king Achish and the way David is actually conducting himself? He tells Achish he is fighting with fellow-Israelites, leading the Philistine king to conclude he is **“making himself odious among his people Israel”** (27:12). The truth is he is killing the enemies of the Israelites, and then sharing some of the spoils with them, making frequent visits to their cities (30:26-31). David is ingratiating himself with the Israelites, while living under the protection of the Philistines. We might say David is “playing both ends against the middle.”

About this time, David must be mentally patting himself on the back: “It can’t get any better than this.” David does not have to hide out in the desolate “God forsaken” wilderness areas of Israel; he can freely go anywhere he wants, with respect. He can even drop in on the king. He does not have to “beg” for a handout for his men, but rather can live high on the spoils of his raids. He does not have to fear that the Israelites will betray him; he frequents Israelite villages and towns, bringing their leaders presents from the spoils of war. And if Saul will not deal with the enemies of Israel who surround this nation, David will. David seems to have the best of both (Israelite and Philistine) worlds. And so it appears, but not for long. The chickens, as we say, are about to come home to roost.

What’s happening now! It is so far.

(28:1-2)

1 Now it came about in those days that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, “Know assuredly that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men.” 2 And David said to Achish, “Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.” So Achish said to David, “Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.”

In the last several months, several families have chosen to have their children sit with them in the 11:00 a.m. teaching hour, where this message is delivered. One of my young friends contributed the title for the message a couple of lessons back. He also presented me with a cartoon version of the lesson for that Sunday. When I was delivering this message and reached this point in the text, a very young member of the family blurted out, “Oh, oh!” She was right. It was not a good time for David. And so I have entitled these first two verses in chapter 28, “Oops.”

The Philistines are continually at war with Israel, as we have seen throughout 1 Samuel. It seems the Philistine commanders conclude that it is time for yet another military campaign against Israel. Achish informs David of the plan, and

“honours” him by informing him he has decided it is time to take David and his men as a part of his division. I don’t know how much of a surprise this is to David, but his response to the king certainly comes as a surprise to the reader: **“Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.”**

This sounds like male macho talk. “Hey, Dude, I’m taking you to the war with me.” “Right on, man, you haven’t seen anything yet.” Does David mean what he says? Does David know for sure whether he means it? I wonder. David may be so taken by surprise he hardly knows what to say. He certainly tells king Achish what he wants to hear, because the king then responds to David’s braggadocio by telling him he intends to make him his bodyguard for life. How amazing! David, who once served as Saul’s armour bearer (16:21), now has been appointed the bodyguard of a Philistine king, and he is about to go to war with the Philistines against Israel. Surely the reader is compelled to ask the question, “What in the world is a guy like you doing in a place like this?”

Conclusion

In concluding our study of this text, the first thing we should say is that it’s not over yet. The author skilfully leaves us scratching our heads, taking us to yet an even more perplexing story (Saul consulting the witch of Endor in 28:3-25). The story that starts here in chapter 27 is concluded in chapters 29-31. But we are not given quick, easy answers; we are left with troubling questions, which we are expected to ponder. The author will not tell us a “happily ever after” fairy tale; he tells us a true story, one that boggles our minds. Do we want the Bible to tell us everything, so that we don’t have to agonize or think for ourselves? We won’t get that, even if it is what we prefer. The Bible often tells us troubling things, and then leaves us to ponder them. The Bible does not do all of our thinking for us; it seeks to stimulate our thinking. *We are not to think independently of God’s Word, but to think in terms of God’s Word.* What does the rest of the Bible teach us to make of this story here?

We can also learn from our text (and many others) that the Bible does not seek to make us into hero worshippers. In Christian and non-Christian circles alike, people are inclined to have their heroes. This is what Hollywood provides for many of our youth. We adults like to think we are more sophisticated. Televangelists are often the heroes of many who watch them and faithfully send their gifts to support them. When one of our Christian heroes fails, we are devastated. We are inclined to throw in the towel, totally devastated by the realization that our heroes are not all they are chalked up to be. If our leaders can’t live up to our standards, we say to ourselves, how can anyone expect us to live up to them? The failure of some public Christian leader often has a domino effect on the Christian community.

The Bible does not give us such heroes, men or women who have the Midas touch, successful in all they do, who never seem to fail. The Bible gives us men and women with all their flaws, men and women just like us, or as James calls them, men **“with a nature like ours”** (James 5:17). Abraham, the man who was willing to offer us his son, Isaac, was also willing to “offer up” his wife Sarah by passing her off as his sister (and more than once, see Genesis 12:13; 20:10-13). Jacob was a man who would not meet the requirements of salesman for a mob-owned used car lot, even if his “uncle” was the mob boss.¹³⁹ We are beginning to see David’s weaknesses, and we certainly know about men like Gideon, Jonah, and Peter. In the Bible, there are no perfect husbands, no perfect fathers, and no perfect wives.¹⁴⁰ God does not want us to “worship” men or to make them our idols. He wants us to worship Him. When we idolize men, we are not only foolish, we set ourselves, and the one we idolize, up for trouble.

Now we come to the bottom line. What does the author intend this passage to teach the readers of his day, and what does this text say to us? Let’s begin with the message for the author’s day.¹⁴¹ We don’t know exactly when this book of 1 Samuel was written, but we do know it was written some time after the events it describes. This is why, for example, we have to be told that one who was called a **“seer”** in the early days of 1 Samuel would be called a **“prophet”** in the reader’s day (1 Samuel 9:9). We are also told that Ziklag, the city given to David in 1 Samuel 27, is a city that remained a possession of Israel’s kings to the day of the reader (1 Samuel 27:6). It would seem that the events of our text would be highly instructive to the “kings” alive in the days when 1 and 2 Samuel were written and first read. Did they see the danger of foreign alliances? They should have, for this was a constant danger in Israel’s history. The lessons David learned as Israel’s “king-to-be” were lessons for every king and “king-to-be.”

There are also lessons for the common people at the time of its writing, and these lessons apply to us today as well. Surely as we come to the first two verses of chapter 28, we must ask, “How in the world did David get himself into a predicament like this?” Where did David go wrong? Where did he fail? Let us ponder these questions carefully and prayerfully, for my contention is that Christians fail today in the same way they failed centuries ago. The problems and the solutions of those days are the same today. Let me suggest some of the ways David failed.

First of all, David fell into the “solitary syndrome” (sin-drome).

David is the benefactor of ministry to him by others. There was Samuel, who not only anointed him as Israel’s next king, but to whom David could flee when Saul was pursuing him (1 Samuel 19:18-24). There was also Abiathar, the only

surviving heir of Ahimelech, who joined David, along with the ephod (1 Samuel 22:20-23; 23:6). Then there was Jonathan, who constantly stood behind him, assuring David he would be the next king (1 Samuel 20:12-17, 41-42; 23:15-18). And there was also Abigail, who greatly encouraged David to do right as Israel's next king (1 Samuel 25:26-31).

Even though David was accompanied by many, he seems somehow to have withdrawn into himself. His conversation in 27:1 is with himself (literally, the text informs us he **“said to his heart”**). David suffers from what I call the “Lone Ranger syndrome.” It is that false sense of “being alone” in your spiritual struggle, pain, or suffering. Even the prophet Elijah was struck with this malady:

9 Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 And he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:9-10, emphasis mine).

13 And it came about when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 Then he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:13-14, emphasis mine).

Whenever we think we are alone in our spiritual struggles, we are self-deceived and ripe for a spiritual fall. David seems to be in that “Lone Ranger” frame of mind. He is certainly not seeking wise counsel or the will of God here, means available to him if he but wished to avail himself of them.

Second, David seems to have forgotten things he should have remembered.

This is a very serious malady indeed. The nation Israel constantly forgot how the Lord had faithfully led them and provided for them in their past, even their very recent past. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is constantly urging the Israelites to **“remember”** all that God had done for them, and warning them not to **“forget”** these things. David has forgotten far too much in choosing to flee from the land of Israel and seek protection and safety in the land of the Philistines. David has forgotten the words the Lord spoke to him through Samuel and others. He has forgotten how the Lord saved him time and time again from Saul. He has forgotten the instruction of the prophet Gad to leave the

stronghold (apparently outside the land) and return to Judah (1 Samuel 22:5). He has forgotten his own words, spoken not that long ago, about the blessedness of being in the land, and the curse of being forced to leave it (chapter 26). David even appears to have forgotten the disaster it was for him to flee to king Achish in Gath (21:10-15). *Forgetfulness (of God's commands, promises, and faithfulness) is often the starting point for serious failure.*

Third, David seems to have closed his eyes to the implications and consequences of his actions, while minimizing the seriousness of his error. David does not purpose to fail. He does not intend to end up in the Philistine army, headed for battle with Saul, Jonathan, and the rest of the Israelite soldiers. All he intends to do is to leave Israel for a short time, just long enough for Saul to lose heart and give up his pursuit. But one sin has a way of opening the door to another, and then another. This is the way it is with David. The situation just keeps going from bad to worse, and David gets in so deep it doesn't look like there is any way out. It all starts with what appears to be a minor lapse in faith, but it ends in a most serious situation in which David finds himself ready to take Goliath's place against king Saul and Israel.

Fourth, David's decision is based upon "sight" rather than on "faith."

"David is not viewing his circumstances through the eyes of faith, but through human sight. His assessment of the situation is merely human. It ignores God's previous provisions, His promises, or His prophetic declarations. David is looking through human eyes, and all he can see is certain death, if he stays in Israel. His only "hope" is in the benevolence, power and provisions of a pagan king. It is not faith, but fear, which triumphs here.

Fifth, David's failure does not come as his response to a crushing defeat, an irresistible temptation, or a major crisis.

I think we would all be much more comfortable if David's decisions in this chapter were made in panic, in the face of monumental troubles, opposition, or temptation. The simple fact is that our text indicates nothing of the kind. In fact, David's failure in chapter 27 follows immediately on the heels of his "successes" in chapter 26. This is not unlike Elijah, who virtually caves in (pardon the pun) after a great victory on Mount Carmel.

What then explains David's failure here in chapter 27? I think I know. *It is one of the greatest enemies the Christian ever faces – weariness.* Listen to these exhortations about weariness:

And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary (Galatians 6:9).

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:3).

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary (Revelation 2:1-3).

I think David simply grows weary of well doing. Think of it. David has now been on the run for some time. Saul has a price on David's head. Now even those from his own tribe, the tribe of Judah (i.e. the Ziphites) are betraying him to Saul. David is indirectly responsible for the deaths of the priests and their families. He has alienated Saul from his son Jonathan and his daughter Michal. David has endangered his own family, so that he feels he has to place them in the care of the king of Moab. David has now accumulated a following of 600 men, and they all have wives and families to worry about. This kind of burden tends to wear one down. David does not “blow out” here, so to speak; he “burns out.” David simply gives up.

It is wrong, but this is the way many of God's people have failed throughout the centuries. But it need not be this way. Those of us who are weary simply need to come to God for strength. We need to understand that it is through our weaknesses that God demonstrates His strength:

28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. 29 He gives strength to the weary, And to *him who* lacks might He increases power. 30 Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, 31 Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary (Isaiah 40:28-31).

28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 “For My yoke is easy, and My load is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

7 And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

I know of many young people who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ and purposed to live their lives in a way that pleases God. Young men and women like this have said no to pornography, no to premarital sex, no to compromising relationships, no to drugs. *And then one day, they become weary, and in a moment of time, they cast aside their restraint and their commitment to follow God. It may not be an instant collapse, but rather a compromise, a concession, which leads to disaster.*

I know of numerous marriages at this very moment on the brink of disaster. Husbands or wives have become frustrated with their mates and with their marriages. Like David, they have affirmed their commitment to biblical principles and reaffirmed their marriages are forever. They have recognized and accepted the fact that their marriages are an earthly picture of Christ and His church. And then, *they grow weary of the struggle, and simply give up, casting aside their commitments to each other, and even their commitments before God and His church.* Many of the Christian marriages I have watched dissolve have crumbled as the result of weariness, on the part of one or both partners.

The same thing happens to Christians in business. These believers know they march to the beat of a different drum than their competitors. They seek not only to obey the laws of the land, but to live within the principles of the Word of God. When they bid a job, they give accurate numbers, knowing that their competition will hedge, only to gouge the customer later on. And then that Christian in business becomes weary of losing contracts, or losing profits, and starts to reason and to conduct their business on human terms, rather than by faith and obedience.

My friend, let us learn from David that *even those with a sincere heart for God are never far from the possibility of failure.* The good news is that even when our faith fails, God remains faithful:

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

Let us cast ourselves on Him who is faithful, and who gives strength to the weary. Let us acknowledge our weakness, and rely on His strength.

1 Samuel 28:1-25

28. Saul and the spiritistic medium

Verses 1-7. Saul's desperate straits

Verses 8-19. Saul resorts to spiritism

Verses 20-25. Saul takes food

God Is There, But He Is Silent

(28:1-7)

1 Now it came about in those days that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Know assuredly that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men." 2 And David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." So Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life." 3 Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him and buried him in Ramah his own city. And Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists. 4 So the Philistines gathered together and came and camped in Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel together and they camped in Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly. 6 When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. 7 Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor."

All of us have had one of those days when absolutely everything that can go wrong does go wrong. This is such a day for Saul. (Incidentally, David's day isn't going too well, either.) Saul's problems are staggering. ***First, the Philistines are waging war against the Israelites, and this time they are very serious about it.*** The Philistines have continually harassed the Israelites throughout the reign of Saul.¹³ But this time, it appears the Philistine kings have determined to break the back of Israel's military might once and for all. This they intend to do by combining all of their armed forces at Aphek (29:1). From there, they will march northward, up through the Plain of Esdraelon to Shunem (28:3-25). Their strategy seems to be to "divide and conquer" Israel by separating the nation in the middle and then working on the northern and

southern halves independently. While the Philistines will fight with their full forces, the Israelites cannot. Saul's scouts inform him of the size and location of the Philistines' forces. The numbers are staggering. On top of all this, they are sticking to the lower ground to make full use of their chariots. I can almost hear Saul mumble under his breath, "We're history."

Second, Saul may well have heard that David is among the Philistines who have assembled to attack Israel.

If Saul dreads facing off with this massive Philistine army, he may also be shaken to learn that David is among these Philistines. Our chapter begins with the account of the Philistine king, Achish, informing David that he and his men will go with him to fight against the Israelites. David assures Achish that he will prove himself a worthy ally, to which Achish responds by informing David that he will be his bodyguard for life. We know from chapter 29 that David and his men are with Achish at Aphek, and it is here that he and his men will be instructed to go back home to Ziklag. It may be that Saul's scouts spot David and his men among the Philistines gathering at Aphek. You can imagine how Saul feels about going up against David, especially after he himself has said to David:

"And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand" (1 Samuel 24:20).

Then Saul said to David, "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail." So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place (1 Samuel 26:25).

Third, Saul is aware of the danger he is in and is desperately afraid.

You may will remember that Saul seems to have been a fearful (or at least retiring) person from the very beginning. He wanted to give up the search for his father's donkeys (9:5). He would not tell his uncle (Abner?) what Samuel had said to him (10:14-16). He hid with the luggage when lots were drawn to identify the king (10:22). So far as we read in 1 Samuel, he never initiates an attack against the Philistines, even though ridding Israel of Philistine opposition is a significant part of his calling as Israel's king (9:16). After the evil Spirit from the Lord came upon him, he became fearful, and at times terrorized (see 16:14; 17:11; 18:12). This full-scale, all-out attack by the Philistines has all the signs of a devastating defeat for Saul and his army, so the author informs us that Saul is scared to death (verse 5).

Fourth, although Saul now desperately seeks to “inquire of the Lord,” he is not able to get any response from God.

Saul is not really very experienced in seeking God’s will, as our text has shown up to this point. Unlike David (see 1 Samuel 22:10, 15), Saul is not accustomed to seeking divine guidance.⁴³ It was not Saul’s idea to inquire of a “seer” to learn where his father’s lost donkeys might be (1 Samuel 9:5-9). When lots were drawn to learn who God had chosen as Israel’s king, Saul was not a part of that process; he was hiding (10:22). Saul did not seek divine guidance regarding when to wage war with the Philistines. There was no need, since Jonathan was usually the one who started the fight by attacking the Philistines (such as when he attacked the Philistine garrison at Geba -- 13:3). Later on in chapter 13, Saul **“forced himself”** to go ahead and offer the burnt offering, rather than continue to wait for Samuel. In doing so, Saul disobeyed the command Samuel had given him in chapter 10, a command pertaining to divine guidance:

“And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. ***You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do***” (1 Samuel 10:8, emphasis mine).

Saul is instructed to wait for Samuel to obtain divine guidance, but he does not.

In chapter 14, Jonathan’s secret attack on the Philistines brought about an earthquake and great confusion among the Philistine warriors. Saul watches all this from a distance, then calls for the ark of God to be brought to him (14:18). The priest is in the process of consulting God when Saul observes that the Philistines are in flight, so he stops the priest in the middle of his inquiry into God’s will and begins to pursue them (14:19f.). Saul’s foolish edict greatly hinders Israel’s pursuit of the Philistines, causing many of the soldiers to sin by eating the blood of the animals they devour in their famished state (14:24-35). After the men eat, Saul is ready to begin his pursuit of the Philistines, but the priest strongly urges that they first “*draw near to God*” to inquire into His will (14:36). When no answer is forthcoming that day, Saul concludes it is due to (Jonathan’s) sin and orders lots to be cast between all the Israelites on the one hand, and Jonathan and himself on the other. Saul and his son are indicated. Lots are then cast between Jonathan and Saul. Jonathan is indicated; Saul fully intends to use the casting of lots to justify putting his own son to death and would have if the people had not refused to allow it. Saul is far from a model of how one seeks divine guidance.

On this occasion as well it does not seem that Saul’s motives are pure in his efforts to inquire of the Lord. It does not seem as though Saul is truly “inquiring

of the Lord” in the sense that he is seeking to learn God’s will in order to do it. This also seems to be the conclusion of the author of 1 Chronicles:

13 So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry *of it*, 14 ***and did not inquire of the LORD*** Therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse (1 Chronicles 10:13-14, emphasis mine).

We are told that Saul “*inquired of the Lord*” (28:6), but it is not a genuine inquiry. Instead, it is Saul’s desperate attempt to get God to bail him out of the trouble into which he has gotten himself. A similar effort to inquire of the Lord is described in the Book of Jeremiah:

1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchijah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying, 2 “Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is warring against us; perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all His wonderful acts, ***that the enemy may withdraw from us***” (Jeremiah 21:1-2, emphasis mine).

Saul’s uneasiness progresses from fear to terror to sheer panic. He must do something drastic, now! It is as though Saul is reliving the events of chapter 13, only this time Saul’s sense of impending doom is even greater. The Philistines are camped in Shunem, and Saul and his army are camped in Gilboa (verse 4). The Philistines are poised to attack, and Saul knows he doesn’t stand a chance. He must act, and quickly -- or so Saul supposes. And so he makes a very desperate and dangerous decision. Since he cannot seem to get God’s attention in any of the conventional ways, he decides that he must inquire of a medium.

A Voice From the Dead

(28:7-14)

7 Then Saul said to his servants, “Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.” And his servants said to him, “Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor.” 8 Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said, “Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall name to you.” 9 But the woman said to him, “Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who are mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you then laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?” 10 And Saul

vowed to her by the LORD, saying, “As the LORD lives, there shall no punishment come upon you for this thing.” 11 Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” And he said, “Bring up Samuel for me.” 12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, “Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul.” 13 And the king said to her, “Do not be afraid; but what do you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I see a divine being coming up out of the earth.” 14 And he said to her, “What is his form?” And she said, “An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe.” And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did homage.

As he is not able to make any connection with God in the conventional ways, Saul decides to seek it in a very different way. Samuel is the only prophet we know of who gave Saul directives from God. There may have been others, but they are not mentioned in the text. Samuel is now dead (verse 3), but Saul comes upon an idea. Maybe he can still speak with Samuel. Maybe he can persuade a medium to conjure him up, so that he can speak with him. Saul instructs his servants to find a woman who is a medium. They know of such a woman living at En-Dor.

This plan to inquire of a medium has its own set of problems, which we can see from the text.

First, God has strictly forbidden the use of mediums.

A number of Old Testament texts forbid the presence of mediums and other spiritists in the land of Israel and also forbid the Israelites to consult such persons. Consider these prohibitions in the Law of Moses:

“Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:31).

“As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people” (Leviticus 20:6).

“Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones, their bloodguiltiness is upon them” (Leviticus 20:27).

10 “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12

“For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. 13 “You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. 14 “For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you *to do so*” (Deuteronomy 18:10-14).

The second problem is that, for once, Saul has done something right: “Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists”

This is truly amazing. For once, it seems, Saul did something right. Now, in the crunch of an imminent Philistine attack, Saul wishes he could locate a medium and do what the Old Testament law forbade. The biggest obstacle in doing so is his own obedience which removed these people from the land. Get this: Saul now regrets doing one of the few things he seems to have done right.

There is yet a third problem, a logistical one.

The Philistines are camped in Shunem; Saul and the Israelite army are camped in Gilboa. En-dor is approximately eight miles north of Gilboa, and to get there, Saul has to go around the Philistines.

There is a fourth problem: Saul cannot afford to be identified.

Saul dares not be identified by anyone whom he might encounter on the way. To kill the opposing king is to be half way to victory over one’s enemy, and thus the king is the primary target. A king could, in caution, disguise himself (see 1 Kings 22:29-36). In addition, Saul does not wish to be recognized by the medium. If she knows who he is she certainly will not agree to conjure up a dead man, knowing it was Saul who put the mediums and spiritists out of the land (see verse 9). His solution is to travel by night, disguising himself by his apparel. He will not wear his royal attire on this mission.

When Saul arrives at the home of the medium, he gets right to the point. He first seeks a commitment from the medium that she will conjure up whomever he names. She resists, fearing this might be one of Saul’s “sting” operations. She does not want to be caught directly disobeying the king’s orders. After all, these men are strangers, or so she supposes. Ironically, Saul swears to her *by the Lord* that she will not be punished for doing what he asks of her (verse 10). He then asks the woman to conjure up Samuel for him. She does not need to ask for further clarification. When the woman sees Samuel, she shrieks. She not only recognizes Samuel, she now recognizes that the one asking her to conjure up

Samuel is none other than Saul himself. I can almost hear her exclaim to herself, “I’m history.”

Saul again assures the woman he will not harm her, and then asks her to describe the person she sees before her.¹⁴ Her response to seeing Samuel and her description of him seems to indicate that this is no ordinary conjuring. She tells Saul that she sees a **“divine being”** (NASB; KJV renders it *“gods”*). The Hebrew text uses the word *“elohim”* (gods), and the Septuagint uses the Greek word *“theous”* (gods). This is not just a “spirit being,” but a **“divine being”** whom she sees. No wonder she is frightened. This **“divine being”** she describes to Saul as one looking like an old man, wrapped with a robe. By her description of this **“divine being”** Saul recognizes him as Samuel. And so Saul bows down with his face to the ground “doing homage” to him (verse 14).

Grave Words

(28:15-19)

15 Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” And Saul answered, “I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and answers me no more, either through prophets or by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I should do.” 16 And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has departed from you and has become your adversary? 17 “And the LORD has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. 18 “As you did not obey the LORD and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the LORD has done this thing to you this day. 19 “Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!”

During the years Saul and Samuel were both alive, Samuel spoke candidly to Saul *for God*. Samuel did not tell Saul what he wanted to hear. In fact, Samuel at times feared for his own life, when he did what he knew would infuriate Saul (see 16:2). In chapters 13 and 15, Samuel rebuked Saul for his sins, and told him frankly that he was going to lose his kingdom. In light of these things, what in the world does Saul expect Samuel to say to him now? If he expects anything different because a medium had conjured up Samuel from the dead, Saul is in for a very rude awakening.

I have five daughters, and some of them are not what you would call a “morning person.” (Frankly, I am not a “morning person,” either.) Saul learns that

conjuring up Samuel from the dead is like waking up one of my daughters early in the morning. It can be like rousing a she-bear. I used to joke about going into the bedroom and poking such a sleepyhead with a stick, without getting too close. Anyway, Samuel seems pretty “grumpy,” if that is the right way to describe him: “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” He could have said this because he didn’t like being disturbed by Saul. (Incidentally, he seems to feel much more free to “snap” at Saul now than he did when he was alive. No need to fear that Saul will kill him now!) Or, he could have said this as a rebuke to Saul, for doing something that he should not have done – conjuring up the spirit of one who is dead. Either way, Samuel’s disapproval is clearly indicated.

Saul sounds like a schoolboy, who has just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar, and has had his knuckles rapped. He seeks to justify his actions by telling Samuel he is greatly distressed. He adds that the reason is the Philistines are waging war against him and that God has departed from him, answering his inquiries no more. It is as though Saul is saying, “I just had to call you, Samuel. You have to tell me what to do. I know it’s against the rules, Samuel, but this is an emergency.”

Samuel is not impressed. He does not tell Saul what to do. In fact, he rebukes Saul for asking him to do what is impossible. Asking Samuel to speak for God, once God has departed from him, is like asking Balaam to curse the people of God, once God has chosen to bless them. Samuel cannot and will not tell Saul what to do. Saul is on his own. But, since Saul has gone to the effort of having him conjured up, Samuel will tell Saul how things are between him and God, and what tomorrow holds. The situation Saul now finds himself in is precisely that which Samuel announced to Saul when he spoke for God in chapters 13 and 15. Saul is now experiencing the fulfilment of Samuel’s earlier prophecies.

Samuel, in very concise words, tells Saul what will happen to him and why. As Samuel indicated to Saul earlier, God has torn the kingdom from Saul’s hands. He is giving that kingdom to David, Saul’s **“neighbor.”**¹⁴ This is because of Saul’s disobedience in failing to fully carry out God’s instructions concerning Amalek. The words of Samuel’s prophecy, spoken to Saul in chapter 15, are now being fulfilled, Samuel tells the king. On the following day, God will give Israel, Saul, and his sons over to the Philistines. Saul and his sons will be killed. Samuel says it as bluntly as it can be said, “Tomorrow, you and your sons will be with me.” Now this is very troubling news. It certainly is not what Saul hoped to hear. He conjures up a prophet, and he gets one. Even from the grave, Samuel will not change his tune.

Saul's Last Supper

(28:20-25)

20 Then Saul immediately fell full length upon the ground and was very afraid because of the words of Samuel; also there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day and all night. 21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was terrified, and said to him, "Behold, your maidservant has obeyed you, and I have taken my life in my hand, and have listened to your words which you spoke to me. 22 "So now also, please listen to the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you that *you may* eat and have strength when you go on *your* way." 23 But he refused and said, "I will not eat." However, his servants together with the woman urged him, and he listened to them. So he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. 24 And the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly slaughtered it; and she took flour, kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it. 25 And she brought *it* before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they arose and went away that night.

What happens next is not a very pretty sight. Saul came to the medium at En-dor that night a very fearful man. After what has just happened to Saul, he literally comes unglued. Saul's knees buckle at the words of Samuel. He falls to the ground, paralyzed as though he has been zapped full-power by a stun gun. In part, this is the result of his having had nothing to eat for some time. In addition, he is fatigued from travelling those eight miles or so from his camp in Gilboa to En-dor. But a good bit of it is due to sheer terror. I can well imagine that by now the medium is getting a little concerned herself and very eager for Saul to be on his way.

The woman now appeals to Saul to listen to her and take her advice. After all, this is the least he can do for her when she has risked her life for him. She pleads with the king to let her fix him something to eat, something to give him strength enough to be on his way. He refuses. His appetite is gone. Both the woman and Saul's servants prevail upon him to eat, not because he is hungry, but because he must regain his strength to return to his camp. Like the father of the prodigal son, the medium of En-dor kills and prepares the fatted calf (see Luke 15:22-24, 29), but it is not for a feast of celebration, nor because the prodigal has repented and returned. It is more like a wake. She slaughters the calf and prepares it, along with some bread. The king eats, and then goes out into the night. It is the darkest day of Saul's life so far, but an even darker day is yet to come -- the next day -- when Samuel's prophecies are fulfilled.

Conclusion

We have an expression that goes: “All’s well that ends well.” If this is true, all is not well, at least so far as Saul is concerned. Dale Ralph Davis entitles the chapter of his commentary on this text of Scripture, *“And It Was Night.”*¹⁶ This title is certainly prompted by the two-fold reference in our text to these events taking place in the darkness of night (28:8, 25). It also seems to be a play on the words of John 13:30, where we are told that Judas left our Lord and the disciples to consummate his betrayal of our Lord. John there very cryptically tells us, **“and it was night.”**

Without a doubt, this is the darkest day of Saul’s life – so far. The next (and last) day will be even darker. Here is the king of Israel, so weak with hunger and terror he cannot even stand up. He is dressed in a pathetic attempt at disguise, but that also has failed. He is at the house of a medium, seeking to inquire of her. And when he manages to speak with Samuel, the prophet tells him only an ancient version of “I told you so.” He tells Saul further that he and his sons will die in battle the following day. He offers him no encouragement, no hope, no chance to repent. It is simply too late. What a tragic picture of Saul we see here.

Forty years earlier, Saul was a promising young ruler and a marvelous physical specimen, who stood head and shoulders above his fellow-Israelites (9:1-2). He started his military career liberating the people of Jabesh-gilead by decisively defeating the Ammonites (chapter 11). How then did things go so wrong for Saul, so that he ends up trembling mass on the floor of a forbidden medium? The answer according to Samuel is quite simple – disobedience. Saul’s first major failure (so far as the biblical text informs us) is at Gilgal, where he fails to wait for Samuel to offer the sacrifices, as he was instructed to do (see 10:7-8). Rather than wait for Samuel to offer the sacrifices and then tell him what he should do (for divine guidance), Saul had gone ahead and offered the sacrifice¹⁷ himself.

His second major failure is hardly a straw, but it does so to speak, break the camel’s back. Samuel gives Saul a very clear divine directive. As Israel’s king, it is Saul’s duty to annihilate the Amalekites for the way they have treated Israel at the exodus. Every Amalekite is to be killed, including the king. In fact, Samuel makes it clear that the king is not to be spared (15:1-3). No children or cattle are to be spared, either. In spite of this command, Saul and the people spared King Agag and the best of the cattle. Samuel presses Saul hard to take personal responsibility for his sin. When Saul seeks to minimize his sin by claiming he was saving the best of the Amalekites’ cattle to sacrifice to God, Samuel sets down a principle that will echo throughout the rest of the Old Testament and the New:

22 And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams. 23 “For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king” (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Saul seems to think men’s sacrifices are what He most values, even if it means disobeying God to do so. Samuel sees it exactly the opposite. *God delights in man’s obedience, more than in his sacrifices*. Obedience to God is the highest good. Disobedience therefore is the greatest evil. Does Saul suppose God will look favorably on the disobedience which made such sacrifices possible? He will not. In fact, God look upon such rebellion as the sin of divination, and upon insubordination as iniquity and idolatry. Saul thinks God will look with pleasure on what he and the Israelites have done in regard to the Amalekites. Samuel tells Saul that God looks upon his actions as though they are the most wicked thing he could do.

Though I had not thought about it in such terms before, I am now inclined to understand 1 Samuel 15:22-23 in the light of 1 Samuel 28:3. Here, the author tells us that Saul has previously rid the land of Israel of those who are mediums and spiritists. As I now look back on chapter 15, I am inclined to understand it as follows. Saul has already removed the mediums and spiritists from the land. He probably feels pretty good about this, because he has done that which the Law of Moses commanded.¹⁴⁸ But then some time after he is commanded to rid the land of the Amalekites. This he does only partially, and as suggested earlier, partial obedience is actually disobedience. When God rebukes Saul through Samuel, He tells the king that his disobedience is just as offensive to Him as idolatry and witchcraft. Does Saul feel somewhat smug about removing the mediums and spiritists? Does he agree that these people and their practices are evil? His disobedience is viewed on the same level as witchcraft and idolatry. The magnitude of his sin in partially obeying God regarding the removal of the Amalekites is the same as that of the sin of witchcraft.

I think Samuel’s words of rebuke in chapter 15 go even further. Samuel is inferring that if Saul’s disobedience and rebellion is not repented of it will actually lead to witchcraft and idolatry. In other words, if Saul does not repent of his sin with regard to the Amalekites, Samuel is prophesying that Saul will be guilty of the very “sins” he has just condemned by removing the mediums and spiritists.

The events of chapter 28 come to pass, with uncanny certainty because Saul fails to take his own sin and Samuel’s rebuke seriously enough. I find a significant

similarity between chapters 13 and 15. In both chapters, Saul sins by willfully disobeying God's command. In both cases, when Samuel confronts Saul, he tries to lay the blame off (at least in part) on someone else. In chapter 13, Saul pardons himself by claiming that Samuel is late (it is his fault), and the people are leaving him (it is their fault). In chapter 15, Saul again seeks to duck his personal responsibility. He first claims to have fully obeyed God; Samuel makes short work of this claim. Then he blames the people, as though they alone kept back the good cattle. Eventually, Saul admits to being afraid of the people, but he still does not assume the responsibility that is his as king. In both chapters 13 and 15, Saul sees his actions as required by an emergency situation. He has mentally declared a "state of emergency" in which his own form of "martial law" sets aside the laws of God. Finally, after all of Saul's flimsy excuses are set aside, his "repentance" barely meets the standard for "regret."

Thus we see why things must happen as they do in chapter 28. Saul started out all right, but very quickly became careless about obeying God's commandments. Even when rebuked for his sins, he does not fully repent, and thus a repetition of his sins is inevitable. Given Samuel's prophetic declaration in chapter 15, we should hardly be surprised to find Saul seeking divine guidance by means of a medium. *If a person finds God's commands repulsive, he also finds them easy to cast aside.* Is it any wonder that such a person eventually turns to witches, mediums (or any number of other means of obtaining guidance), when such people "direct" them in the way they really wish to go in the first place (compare 2 Timothy 4:3-4)? We see that the end of Saul's life is tragic, but it should not be surprising. It is the logical outcome of the path he has chosen to walk.

As we read this story of Saul's humiliation in the home of the medium of Endor, we would like to comfort ourselves by thinking this is a strange, bizarre situation, a fluke. I strongly maintain it is no fluke at all. Indeed, I believe what we see here is the norm. Saul is a living demonstration of "the rule," rather than "the exception." Saul is a kind of prototype of the nation Israel.¹⁰⁰ We see, in the life (and death) of Saul, a microcosm, a miniature version of Israel's history. Israel, like Saul, was not chosen because of his high standing, but in spite of the fact that he was of less than noble stock (compare Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 1 Samuel 9:21; 10:22; 15:17). Like the nation Israel, God raised up Samuel to "**utterly destroy**" the Canaanite nations (compare Deuteronomy 7:1-2; 1 Samuel 15:1-3). Samuel, like the nation Israel, was to trust in God and keep His commandments, and not to imitate the heathen (compare Deuteronomy 7:2-5, 9-16; 1 Samuel 15:20-23). And, like Israel, God would destroy Saul for his flagrant, consistent rebellion (compare Deuteronomy 7:4; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14). Notice how these two themes are intertwined in chapter 12:

14 “If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. 15 “And if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, *as it was* against your fathers. 16 “Even now, take your stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes. 17 “Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD by asking for yourselves a king.” 18 So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. 19 Then all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins *this* evil by asking for ourselves a king.” 20 And Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. 21 “And you must not turn aside, for *then you would go* after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile. 22 “For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself. 23 “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. 24 “Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. 25 “But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king shall be swept away” (1 Samuel 12:14-25).

Finally, the nation Israel was chosen by God to be a **“kingdom of priests”** (Exodus 19:6), but their rule as God’s **“sons”** did not last long, due to their disobedience (see Exodus 4:23). Then it was Israel’s kings who were to be God’s **“sons,”** ruling over the nation (see 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:4-9). Ultimately, there is only one good and perfect **“King,”** one **“Son of God,”** in whom we can be saved from our sins, and in whom we can reign (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-25).

Saul is not only a prototype of the nation Israel, he is a tragic example of what can happen to each and every one of us. Those who desire to know and do the will of God will know it, for God will reveal it to them (see John 7:17). But if we stubbornly rebel against God, He will not listen to our prayers, and He will cease disclosing Himself and His will to us (He will not **“cast His pearls before swine;”** see also Psalm 68:18; John 2:23-25; Mark 4:20-25). Eventually, those who resist and disobey God’s will and His Word (which can hardly be distinguished) begin to look elsewhere for teaching which is still represented as “Christian,” though it is not (see 2 Timothy 3:1-13; 4:1-4).

There is, I believe, a “point of no return” in a person’s life. There is a point in time where God ceases to convict the sinner, but rather hardens their heart, due to persistent rejection of the gospel. There is a point in time when it is, humanly speaking, too late. Those who foolishly suppose they can continue to live in sin and reject the gospel, thinking God will always “be there for them,” are wrong.

1 And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain – 2 for He says, “AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU”; behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION” (2 Corinthians 6:1-2).

I believe there is also a “point of no return” for a Christian who is living in constant, wilful rebellion. It is not that this person will lose their salvation, but they will lose the “joy” of their salvation. They may very well lose the assurance of their salvation. They certainly will lose the sense of intimacy and fellowship they could and should have with Christ and His church. They may even lose their lives, even as Saul did (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 1 John 5:13-17).

Though it may not be a comforting thought, we are more like Saul than we would like to believe. There is a lot of “Saul” in every one of us. *This is why we must abide in Christ and in His Word.* This is why we must pray for strength, and that we will not fall into temptation. This is why we need “**not to forsake the assembling of ourselves**” and the encouragement of Christian brothers and sisters, and we must beware of persistent, wilful sin (Hebrews 10:19-31).

It is very clear that our text is no fairy tale. Saul does not live “happily ever after,” as fairy tale people do. Neither does anyone who fails to trust and obey God. Let us be sobered and humbled by Saul, and let us acknowledge our weaknesses, and rely wholly on His strength.

29. David’s defection to the Philistines

Verses 1-5. Results of David’s lapse of faith

Verses 6-11. Achish dismisses David

1 Samuel 29:1-30:6

A Fly on the Wall of a Philistine Tent

(29:1-5)

1 Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, while the Israelites were camping by the spring which is in Jezreel. 2 And the

lords of the Philistines were proceeding on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were proceeding on in the rear with Achish. 3 Then the commanders of the Philistines said, “What *are* these Hebrews *doing here*?” And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, “Is this not David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or *rather* these years, and I have found no fault in him from the day he deserted *to me* to this day?” 4 But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him, and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, “Make the man go back, that he may return to his place where you have assigned him, and do not let him go down to battle with us, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For with what could this *man* make himself acceptable to his lord? *Would it not be* with the heads of these men?” 5 “Is this not David, of whom they sing in the dances, saying, ‘Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands’?”

The Philistines have chosen Aphek as a staging point for the consolidation of their armies in preparation for their attack on Israel. Here, each of the five Philistine lords (see chapters 5 and 6) come with the men under their command. (It appears each of these commanders is also the king of one of the five principal Philistine cities. Achish is the king of Gath, and thus the commander of the troops from that area.) The troops are passing by (their commanders) in review, by hundreds and thousands. Four of the five Philistine commanders are shocked and angered by what they see.

Sometimes a person will say, “I wish I could have been a ‘fly on the wall’ to hear what went on when” They mean that they would very much like to have been present to hear or see what happened at a certain place and time. By divine inspiration, we are allowed to become a virtual ‘fly on the wall’ of a Philistine tent – the tent in which the five Philistine commanders hold a heated discussion.

The “rear guard” of the entire Philistine army is none other than David and his men. It has taken a while (and a bit of prompting) for me to grasp the significance of this, since I have no military experience. You recall that Achish “honoured” David by making him his lifetime bodyguard. I take it that of the five divisions of soldiers who pass by that day, the fifth division is that led by Achish. David is at the back of the entire army.¹⁵¹ This is a most crucial position, for if at all possible, the opposing army will try to flank their enemy and then attack them from behind, as well as from in front. Those stationed at the back are some of the finest, bravest, and most highly skilled warriors. David and his men are given this honor.

What Achish regards as an “honor” is perceived as a “horror” to the other Philistine commanders. While we are not told what David is thinking or planning to do here, we are allowed to overhear the exchange between Achish and his four commander colleagues as this top level military summit takes place. The other four commanders are livid. They cannot imagine how Achish could be so nave as to take David into battle with them, and to do so by placing him in a very strategic position. They are not at all happy with the situation and waste no time calling Achish to account for his folly. What in the world are David and his 600 warriors (*these Hebrews*) doing in the Philistine army?

Achish has a ready explanation. Is this not David, Saul’s servant, Saul the *King of Israel*? Achish sees things exactly opposite from the other four commanders. He looks upon David as an asset, precisely because of who he is. David is a turncoat, a man who is faithful to him rather than to Saul. Who cannot see the value in having one of Saul’s most trusted men as an ally, after it becomes apparent that David has indeed changed sides? David is now one of them. He cannot possibly go back to Israel. There is absolutely nothing to worry about, he assures his colleagues. In all the time since David has deserted Saul, Achish has found no fault in him. “Trust me, fellows, David is one of us, and he can do us a lot of good.”

The four fellow-commanders are not impressed in the least by the confidence of Achish or by his assurances. If anything, the answer Achish gives them makes them even more angry with him. How can this man be so taken in by David? How can he be so stupid? How can he fail to see what David is really up to? David is a Hebrew. He is a Hebrew in exile. He will do anything he can to win the favor of King Saul. How better to accomplish this than to feign loyalty to the Philistines, and then turn against them in the heat of the battle?¹⁵² Has Achish forgotten David’s military genius and might, and his popularity among his own people? Let him hear the poem one more time: “Saul has killed his thousands; David his ten thousands.”

The four commanders do not give Achish any choice. They instruct Achish to send David home – back to Ziklag. He is not going to battle with them, or perhaps more accurately, they are not going into battle with David. If Achish wants to continue to offer David asylum in Ziklag, good enough. That is a place remote enough that David can do little harm there. Let David be sent back to Ziklag, but he will not be going to war with the Philistine army. That is final!

Achish Apologizes to David and Sends Him Home

(29:6-11)

6 Then Achish called David and said to him, “As the LORD lives, you *have been* upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the army are pleasing in my sight; for I have not found evil in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, you are not pleasing in the sight of the lords. 7 “Now therefore return, and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.” 8 And David said to Achish, “But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day when I came before you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” 9 But Achish answered and said to David, “I know that you are pleasing in my sight, like an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He must not go up with us to the battle.’ 10 “Now then arise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who have come with you, and as soon as you have arisen early in the morning and have light, depart.” 11 So David arose early, he and his men, to depart in the morning, to return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

Achish now has the unpleasant task of “disappointing” David, and telling him he must go home. He does so, using language unbefitting a true pagan: “**As the LORD lives, . . .**” (29:6). This is not the pagan term for “gods,” but the Hebrew term *Yahweh*, for the one true God, the God of Israel. Later on in verse 9, this Philistine king tells David he is “**like an angel of God.**” These are strange words indeed. It is not David who is talking “God talk,” but Achish. It may be that he is carefully choosing words to accommodate David’s faith. It may be that David’s faith is having an effect on Achish.

It is almost amusing to read the nice things Achish says about David. They are so flattering to David, and so false. Achish tells David he has been pleasing in his eyes, that from the day he first arrived to stay with him, he has done no wrong against him. Would Achish feel the same way and say the same things if he knew what David had really been doing, whom he had been raiding and killing, and that his reports to Achish were false? I think not! But Achish has more good things to say of David. He tells him that he is “**like an angel of God**” in his sight (verse 9). Achish is completely taken in by David, and the immensity of David’s deception is evident in the words of praise of this pagan king. Achish not only flatters David, he apologizes to him. He explains to David that while he wants David to accompany him in the coming battle with Israel, his four colleagues will have no part of such a plan. David and his men will return to Ziklag in the morning.

David never ceases to amaze me. If I were in David's sandals, I would be dancing in the streets after hearing what Achish has just said. Here he is, in a seemingly hopeless situation, caught between a rock and a hard place. The four Philistine commanders refuse to allow David to go into battle with them, and Achish sheepishly gives David the "bad news." Bad news? This is fantastic! David does not need to fight with the Israelites, with Saul, or with Jonathan. Neither does David have to fight with Achish or any of the Philistines. All he needs do is go home to his own place in Ziklag. Rather than humbly submit to these orders from Achish and the Philistine commanders, David protests, as though he would talk them out of their decision, as though he is bound and determined to go to war. Given a "**way of escape,**" it seems that David turns it down.

Dale Ralph Davis does not miss the humor in this interchange between Achish and David, writing:

"There is more than a little humor in this scene (vv. 6-8). Achish stands there, apologetically emphasizing how he thinks David should go with him in this campaign and extolling David's faithfulness, which he has no reason to extol. On the other hand, David with disbelief on his face and exasperation in his voice protests the rejection he has no reason to protest. The deceived defends his deceiver, and the relieved disputes his relief!"¹⁵³

If David's words of protest are an act, David is a magnificent actor. Gratefully, the minds of these four Philistine commanders cannot be changed. David will return to Ziklag in the morning.

Early the next morning, both David and the Philistine warriors arise to get on their way. The Philistines set out for Jezreel, where the Israelites are encamped, and David heads back for Ziklag. David has been saved, and this by the angry reaction of four Philistine commanders who overrule the plans of Achish.

Trouble at Home

(30:1-6)

1 Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; 2 and they took captive the women *and all* who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried *them* off and went their way. 3 And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. 4 Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there

was no strength in them to weep. 5 Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. 6 Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

While David and his men are with Achish at Aphek, the Amalekites are plundering Ziklag. If we have learned anything, it is that *failure to completely carry out God's word has devastating consequences*. Saul's failure in regard to the Amalekites is bringing his reign as king to an end. It will cost him his own life and the lives of his sons. David's raids, while based at Ziklag, are against the enemies of Israel, which include the Amalekites (see 27:8). Is this raid in retaliation? For whatever reason, the Amalekites take advantage of the military moves of the Philistines and attack virtually defenceless villages and cities. Among them is Ziklag. The city is destroyed, burned to the ground. Providentially, all of the people of Ziklag are spared, along with the cattle. David does not deal so kindly with the Amalekites.¹⁵⁴

For David and his men, their trip from Aphek to Ziklag must have been light-hearted, something akin to the mood of a busload of college students on Spring break on their way to the mountains for a ski trip. I can imagine the relief David and his men must feel as they leave the ranks of the Philistines and turn back toward Ziklag. They have come through this awkward situation with honor, rather than with shame. Achish still thinks highly of David, and the four Philistine commanders still seem to fear him. They do not have to do battle with their fellow-Israelites, and neither do they have to turn against the Philistines. They have been rescued. No lives have been lost fighting. All they have to do is to return to Ziklag and enjoy spending a little time with their families.¹⁵⁵ How do these men "spell relief," as the television commercials say? They spell it "Z I K L A G."

As they draw near Ziklag, they begin to see, and perhaps smell, smoke. A growing sense of dread falls upon this small army. One can imagine that puzzled looks become looks of alarm, and noisy chatter ceases, replaced by a chilling silence. The city is in shambles, burned to the ground. There is absolutely no sign of life. Neither are there any bodies lying about. Some may still be alive, but those who are alive may wish they were dead.

This may be the darkest day in David's life to this point in time. At this moment, no one seems to be thinking of pursuing those who have done this, whoever they might be.¹⁵⁶ David's two wives have been taken, and so have all the families of

his men. The men are grief-stricken. They could not have imagined anything worse. They all weep until they have no strength left to continue.

This is not a pretty sight, but it gets even uglier. As the apparent reality begins to set in, David's men begin to think about what has happened. It is all David's fault. David brought them to Gath and then to Ziklag. David had them bring their families along. David ordered raids on peoples like the Amalekites. David's wheeling and dealing got them inducted into the Philistine army. Because of David's relationship with Achish, they are all far away, in Aphek, while their own families are terrorized and kidnapped. They have had just about enough of David and his leadership. They are greatly distressed and ready to vent their anger. Talk begins to circulate among the men about stoning David.

It is now about as bad as David can possibly imagine. He had been rejected by Saul, and then by many of his fellow-Israelites. Some of David's kinsmen were ready and willing to turn him over to Saul to be put to death. Rejected by Saul and the Israelites, David fled to Achish, who received him with open arms. But now David is rejected by the Philistines and sent home. And when he gets home, he finds his family and the families of his men gone, the cattle taken, and the city in ruins. To top it all off, David is now being rejected by many of his own men, who would like to see him dead as well. Everything that could possibly go wrong has gone wrong.

Conclusion

As we pause in our study at this dark moment in David's life, let us reflect on what has happened and what we can learn from it.

The first lesson we learn (or are reminded of) is that sin's consequences are often delayed, but inevitable.

What we read in our text is the result of a very bad decision on David's part made over a year before. It was his decision to leave the land of Israel and flee to Achish in the land of the Philistines for safety and protection (27:1ff.). In the light of David's words to Saul in chapter 26, one could hardly argue with his decision to take his men and their families to the land of the Philistines. At the very least, this decision was contrary to his own convictions, so clearly and passionately expressed to Saul. The immediate outcome seemed favorable. David and his men were able to be with their families. They were welcomed by Achish and lived comfortably while raiding and plundering their enemies. They even won the favor of many of their fellow-Israelites (30:26-31). They were playing both ends against the middle, and it was working well.

Then, as always, the consequences of sin begin to appear. David has become too popular with Achish. Instead of being a refugee, an exile, David becomes the bodyguard of a Philistine king and a leader of 600 in the Philistine army. David finds himself caught in the middle. The time for him to make good on all of his claims has come. Now he is obligated to wage war against the Lord's anointed, and with his son Jonathan, David's beloved friend. David's flight to the Philistines, which was intended to "save" his men and their families and give them time together, has now brought about their captivity by an unknown raiding party. David's men, for whose benefit he apparently acted in fleeing to Philistia, are now ready to stone him. The chickens (we say in a proverb) always "come home to roost." They certainly have here.

God and Satan are vastly different here. God makes the consequences of sin very clear. Though there are many particulars, we can sum it all up by the statement: **"the wages of sin is death"** (Romans 6:23). Even when it comes to discipleship – to following Christ – our Lord wants people to know both the immediate price tag and the long-term benefits. God does not seek to **"tempt"** us to do good by putting the price tag in fine print. Satan does. He minimizes the cost of sin and often denies it all together (e.g., **"You surely shall not die!"** Genesis 3:4). But be assured that sin always has a very high price.

For David, the ride is over. Now it is time to pay.

A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool is arrogant and careless (Proverbs 14:16).

Second, we should see from our text that the adverse consequences of our own sins extend beyond ourselves, and often cause pain and suffering to those we love most.

Almost sure David must have thought he was acting in his family's best interests by taking them to the land of the Philistines. But his doing so, which was wrong for him (chapter 26), was also wrong for his family. We know this incident eventually turns out right. But during those days that these family members are terrorized and traumatized, a high price was being paid – by them! When Abram instructed his wife, Sarai, to lie about being his wife, both he and she spent some agonizing nights apart, all the price tag for his sin.

Asaph, the psalmist of old, wrote a psalm about a very critical point in his life, Psalm 73. He begins the psalm by his affirmation of a biblical principle:

"Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart" (Psalm 73:1).

He then goes on to tell us that as he looks around, this just doesn't seem to be true. The righteous seem to be afflicted, and the wicked seem to prosper. All the

while that the wicked prosper, they mock God. Asaph is just about ready to throw in the towel, but he realizes that if he sins, others will suffer:

If I had said, “I will speak thus,” Behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children (Psalm 73:15).

That is the way sin works. *Not only does it have painful consequences for the sinner, it also adversely impacts many others.* Among these “others” are those we may love the most. When a husband or a wife chooses to forsake their marriage vows and commit adultery, they cause great suffering, not only for their mate, but for their family as well. *Sin never pays, it is never worth the price. But those who “pay” greatly for our sin are often those we love.* For God’s sake, for your own sake, and for the sake of those you love, see sin for what it is, and what it does. The wailing we find in our text is a part of the price of sin, David’s sin. I have said it in the past to those contemplating willful sin, and I now say it again to those of us who may be toying with committing a certain sin (or planning to persist in it). I have yet to see the man who chooses to sin look back upon his sin with a smile on his face, as though it was worth the price.

Third, while our text underscores the high price of sin, it also gives us hope – it reminds us that there is a way of escape.

I have a friend who says something like this: “I don’t just have feet of clay; I’m clay all the way up to my arm pits!”¹⁵⁷ David was “clay all the way to his armpits,” too. But let us note the contrast the author draws between David and Saul. Both Saul and David have gotten themselves into a serious situation, one that appears hopeless. Both Saul and David are deeply distressed, so much so that they have little strength. When Saul goes out, he does so **“at night.”** When David departs from the Philistines, it is **“morning.”** It is as though the writer wants us to see the differences between Saul and David, even in the midst of their similarities.

The last part of verse 6 is a significant clue, not only to the difference between David and Saul, but as to the source of this difference:

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God (verse 6).

Saul goes off to consult a witch; David strengthens himself in the Lord his God. There is the difference. Saul never seems to repent, never seems to have a heart for God. David does have a heart for God and does repent. David, like most of us, finds that many of his turning points are during times of suffering and sorrow, in the dark times of his life. But in this dark day of David’s life, when he has no one else to turn to, he turns to God.

How does he do it? How does he strengthen himself in the Lord his God? We should note that the author gives us little detail here. He does not give us a formula, a series of fail-proof steps. We live in a day when people want a quick fix with a sure cure, and often by the performance of a set of neatly laid out steps – a formula. In the final analysis, I do not think the Christian life is lived by formulas, but by truths and principles. There are do's and don'ts, but these are not formulas. Let us note here that David finds his spiritual strength in the Lord his God.

Having said there are no formulas given here, we do find hints that may be profitable to those who would strengthen themselves in the Lord. We may very well recall a previous incident when Jonathan helped to strengthen David in the Lord:

15 Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. 16 And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God. 17 Thus he said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also." 18 So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house (1 Samuel 23:15-18).

If David strengthened himself *in the Lord*, we can probably infer that just as Jonathan did earlier, David must have reminded himself anew of the character of God and the promises of God. If God is who He is, in terms of His character (His attributes), we can be assured that what He promises, He will do. Paul put it this way:

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day (2 Timothy 1:12; see also Jude 1:24-25).

Another factor related to David's strengthening comes immediately after verse 6:

7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. 8 And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue *all*." 9 So David went, he and

the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, *where* those left behind remained (1 Samuel 30:7-9).

David not only strengthens himself in the Lord, David inquires of the Lord. He seeks after God. He seeks to know the will of God in this situation, and then he does it. How different David is from Saul in this regard. David's strength then seems to come from contemplating who God is, what He has promised, and what He wants us to do. David may have gotten himself and others into a lot of trouble, due to a foolish decision, but he also turns back to the God to whom he has entrusted himself.

Fourth, this passage has some very encouraging things to teach us about God.

This text reminds us of the faithfulness of God, even when we lack faith.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

God anointed David as Israel's next king. God was going to see to it that David was Israel's next king. Neither Saul, nor unfaithful Israelites, nor Philistine kings, nor his own soldiers, not even David himself could keep David from becoming Israel's king. God's purposes and promises are sure.

God is not only faithful, as we see from our text, He is also merciful. David has simply gotten himself into a real mess. How easily we could say that David made this mess, let him clean it up. How good it feels to let him simmer in his own sauce. God does allow David to experience the painful consequences of his sins, but He does not take pleasure in doing so; He takes pleasure in showing mercy. This He does by rescuing David, David's men, and all their families and possessions. This we shall see accomplished shortly.

God's sovereignty is so apparent in the rescue of David and his men from military service, service to the Philistines and against Israel. God uses David and even his sin to achieve His ultimate purposes. God does not cause David to sin, nor is this sin excused. But in the end, God's sovereignty (absolute control) is so great that He can even employ the disobedience and sins of men to further His own purposes. He used the sinful betrayal of Joseph by his brothers to save the nation Israel. So God uses sinful men in our text. He used David, as we have seen. He uses the naiveté of a king like Achish and the foresight and practical wisdom of the four Philistine commanders. He will even use the Amalekite attack for a good purpose. I love what Davis says about God's use of His enemies:

“We see it again. What instruments does Yahweh use to rescue his servant from his dilemma? The commanding officers of the Philistine army. It was not the first time Yahweh had turned enemies into saviours (see 23:19-28). Philistines make such unwitting but effective servants! Who has ever been his counsellor?! (Cf. Isa. 40:13-14).”¹⁵⁸

“What our text does teach is that even in our folly and fainting fits, we are still no match for our God, who has thousands of unguessable ways by which he rescues his people – even by the mouths of Philistines. He can make the enemy serve us as a friend. He not only prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies but also has the knack of making the enemies prepare the table!”¹⁵⁹

We sometimes unthinkingly assume God is a saving God only at the cross of Calvary. The fact is that God has been and still is a saving God. He has been saving men from the beginning of history. God is a rescuer. He rescued Noah and his family from the flood (Genesis 6-9). He rescued Abram from Egypt and from the hand of Abimelech in Gerar (Genesis 13, 20). He rescued Lot and his daughters from Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). He rescued Jacob and his family from extinction as a separate nation (Genesis 37ff.). He rescued the Israelites from Pharaoh, and from the evil hand of many other kings and nations. He constantly rescued the Israelites from their surrounding enemies during the days of the judges. If God needed practice in saving men (which He most certainly does not!), He would be very good at it by now.

But all of these earlier deliverances do not hold a candle to the great and final act of deliverance that He brought about for men in the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins, bearing our punishment. He not only takes our sins upon Himself, He offers His righteousness to us so that we may have eternal life and dwell with Him for all eternity. And God accomplished this through the sinful betrayal of Judas, the jealousy and scheming of the Jewish religious leaders, the cooperation of Gentile Roman rulers (who sought to be politically correct), and the passivity (and even participation) of the people. This He did so that sinful men might be forgiven for their sins and receive the righteousness which God offers to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Have you been rescued yet? Have you come to see the plight into which your sin has put you? God provided a **“way of escape”** in a way no one would ever have expected or asked – through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary. All you need to do is to receive this forgiveness, as a gift of God’s mercy and grace. What a wonderful thing it is to be freed and forgiven, to be rescued by God. To God be the glory.

1 Samuel 30:1-31

30. David's chastening and restoration

Verses 1-6. The plundering of Ziklag

Verses 7-20. The enemy defeated

Verses 21-31. The spoil divided equitably

The Setting

(30:1-6a)

1 Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; 2 and they took captive the women *and all* who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried *them* off and went their way. 3 And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. 4 Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. 5 Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. 6 Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters.

It doesn't take long for word to get out that the Philistines are headed north to wage a major attack against Israel. The Amalekites, who seemed to make their living (not unlike David) by raiding Philistine and Israelite towns and cities in the south, could not have received better news. Since the men of fighting age had gone to war, few or none were left behind to defend the Israelite¹⁶⁰ and Philistine towns, including Ziklag. While David and his men are passing in review with the Philistine army (29:2), the Amalekites were plundering Ziklag. These raiders take all the cattle and possessions, kidnap all the women and children, and burn the city to the ground.

When David and his men approach the city of Ziklag, they are horrified to see that the city has been destroyed and their families taken captive. No one has been killed, but every living soul has been taken. It is little comfort that their families are still alive. Each man imagines what is happening (or would soon happen) to his wife and children. At best, they will become slaves, to be worked

hard and cruelly treated. At worst . . . no one even wanted to consider this. David's two wives also are taken.

These 600 fighting men are greatly distressed by what has happened to their city and their families. They weep until they have no sobs left. Then they began to think about how this came to pass. It had been David's plan to bring them to the land of the Philistines (27:1-4); it was David's request that they live in this remote city of Ziklag (27:5-6), and it was David who led them off to fight with the Philistines, leaving their families vulnerable to just such an attack. Some are so angry there is talk of stoning David.

Hot Pursuit; Cold Trail

(30:6b-10)

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. 7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. 8 And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue *all*." 9 So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, *where* those left behind remained. 10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men, for two hundred who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor, remained *behind*.

As Davis points out, not since chapter 23 has David sought God's will by means of the ephod, and not since chapter 26 has he mentioned the name of the Lord. As is often the case, tragedy turns David's heart toward the Lord. This chapter is another one of David's finest hours. David first strengthens himself in the Lord, and then He turns to the Lord for specific guidance concerning their families and those who have kidnapped them. David asks the Lord to reveal whether he should pursue those who have taken their loved ones. Will he overtake them if he does pursue them? The answer to these questions is "Yes!" God assures David he will not only overtake this band, but he will also completely rescue all that has been taken.

We must remember the physical and mental condition of these men. They have just traveled nearly 60 miles from Aphek back to Ziklag, no doubt pressing hard to get home as soon as possible. They can rest up at Ziklag, once they arrive, or so they think. Then, finding their loved ones kidnapped, their cattle stolen, and their city destroyed by fire, they weary themselves weeping (verse 4). Now they are off in hot pursuit of the enemy. The enemy raiding party has a substantial

lead, and the trail is getting cold. They can easily disappear into the wilderness. If they are to be overtaken in time to rescue their loved ones, David and his men must move quickly.

David and his men are marching double time. As time passes and the heat of the sun works on David and his men, they grow weary. When they come to the brook Besor, a third of the men simply cannot go on. They have plenty of motivation – their families are in danger, and they want to be there to rescue them – but they simply do not have the strength to continue on. Two hundred men collapse there by the brook, unable to press on. Even if they do go on, they will only slow the rest down. David and the other 400 men press on, leaving much of their gear behind with the 200 so that they can move faster and expend less energy.

A Man Left For Dead

Gives New Life To David's Pursuit

(30:11-15)

11 Now they found an Egyptian in the field and brought him to David, and gave him bread and he ate, and they provided him water to drink. 12 And they gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. 13 And David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" And he said, "I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick three days ago. 14 "We made a raid on the Negev of the Cherethites, and on that which belongs to Judah, and on the Negev of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." 15 Then David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this band."

The trail is indeed cold. It seems that David and his men do not even know who the raiders are. (We are told in verse 1, but David and his men seem to learn this information in verses 13-14.) David and his men must begin to wonder what direction their pursuit should take. At this critical moment, they just "happen" to come across a man who has been left half-dead in a field. The man is so weak he cannot talk. It may seem to some that this is a "waste of time" for David and his men to stop and render aid to this man. Whether this is out of pure compassion (making David a kind of good Samaritan), their efforts are well rewarded. It

takes bread and water, then a piece of fig cake and raisins to bring this man back to life, since he has gone three days and nights without either food or water.

When the man finally has sufficient strength to speak, David begins to question him. The answers to his questions must lift the spirits of David and his men, for the man tells them he is an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. His master left him behind three days before because he was sick and slowing everyone down. His master left him there to die, with no food or water. He then tells David he is with the Amalekite raiding party that plundered Ziklag.

David asks the young man if he would be willing to guide them to the Amalekite camp. Normally, I am sure he would not consider such a thing. But since his master and the others left him behind to die, he is willing to cooperate, in exchange for David's assurance that he will not be killed or handed back over to his master. This half-dead servant gives new life to David's search for the Amalekite raiders and their captives.

Rescued (30:16-20)

16 And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. 17 And David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day; and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. 18 So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. 19 But nothing of theirs was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought *it* all back. 20 So David had captured all the sheep and the cattle *which the people* drove ahead of the *other* livestock, and they said, "This is David's spoil."

There was no longer any need to try to track this raiding party. Thanks to the Egyptian slave whom they revived, they would now be guided to the Amalekite camp. David and his men arrive at the raiders' camp to find the Amalekites totally vulnerable. After all, the Philistines (along with David and his men, they suppose), and the Israelites are far away to the north at war. Who would come after them? They enjoy a successful mission, and now they are home where they can indulge themselves with the fruits of their victories. The Amalekites are **"spread over all the land"** (verse 16), implying that they are not tightly assembled, which would be the best defensive posture. (In the western movies, a wagon train always circled the wagons when under attack, placing the women

and children inside the circle.) If the expression “divide and conquer” is true, these folks had already divided themselves by spreading out. On top of this, the Amalekites are eating and drinking and dancing. In short, they are too drunk to stand up straight, much less fight.

If this is the Amalekite base camp, then there be more people here than just the raiding party. David and his men are thus greatly outnumbered. But given the drunken state of the Amalekites, they are easy prey. David and his men attack, a slaughter that lasts for many hours.¹⁶⁴ Not a single person escapes, except the 400 men who flee on camels.¹⁶⁵ Everything and everyone the Amalekites had taken from Ziklag is recovered. David and his men suffer no losses at all (except for what had been burned at Ziklag). David’s two wives are among the hostages rescued. The author is very specific. Nothing is missing. David brings it *all* back. Just as God indicated, they have overtaken their enemy and prevailed. This could not have been a more successful mission.

Dividing Over the Spoils

or

A Victory Is Almost Spoiled

(30:21-31)

21 When David came to the two hundred men who were too exhausted to follow David, who had also been left at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him, then David approached the people and greeted them. 22 Then all the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David answered and said, “Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead *them* away and depart.” 23 Then David said, “You must not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us. 24 “And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike.” 25 And so it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day. 26 Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent *some* of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, “Behold, a gift for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD: 27 to those who were in Bethel, and to those who were in Ramoth of the Negev, and to those who were in Jattir, 28 and to those

who were in Aroer, and to those who were in Siphmoth, and to those who were in Eshtemoa, 29 and to those who were in Racal, and to those who were in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to those who were in the cities of the Kenites, 30 and to those who were in Hormah, and to those who were in Bor-ashan, and to those who were in Athach, 31 and to those who were in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to go.”

The victory is now won, and everything that was lost has been recovered. In fact, not only have David and his men recovered everything they lost, they gained a whole lot more. They gained the spoils the Amalekites obtained through their raids on the Philistine and Israelite towns. These spoils now present David with a major problem. Some of the 400 men who have defeated the Amalekites are refusing to share any of these spoils with the 200 men who stayed behind.

Only a segment of the 400 men who fought with the Amalekites are “*wicked and worthless men*.” Not all of the 400 are this way, just some of them. But these wicked, worthless men seem to be taking charge. Their reasoning goes like this: only 400 men did the actual fighting; the other 200 had no part in the battle or the victory that was won. The 200 should be given back what they lost. But they should not be given a portion of the extra spoils of war, the spoils the Amalekites took from the Israelites and Philistines. These extra spoils should be divided only among the 400 warriors. The refusal of these men to share any of their spoils with the 200 seems to be based upon these faulty assumptions:

- (1) They assume the spoil is theirs to divide as they please, and they make it clear they are refusing to share any of “their” spoils with the 200.
- (2) They assume that the 200 men have had no part in this battle or this victory, just because they were not with the 400 when they fought and won the battle with the Amalekites.
- (3) They assume that the victory was indeed *their* victory, something for which they could take credit, a victory for which they should expect a reward.
- (4) These men are not asking for a bigger share of the spoils, they are demanding it. They are not asking for David’s leadership, either, they are usurping it, or at least attempting to do so.

David does not let these wicked men prevail. He takes the initiative in dealing with their demands and handles them very well.¹⁶⁹ He refuses to allow these

men to have their way, while showing them why they are wrong in what they demand. Consider David's reasoning.

(1) They have not earned these spoils, as they suppose. The victory and the spoils are a gracious (and thus unmerited) gift from God. God gave these spoils, as He gave the victory. How then can these men claim the spoils, as though they earned them?

(2) The victory is a team victory, and the team is greater than 400 in number. When David employs the word *us*, it seems clear he includes all 600. "God gave the victory to *us*," David argues, "to the whole 600 men, and not just to the 400."

(3) David's 600 men are all *brothers* (verse 23). This is not just a collection of individuals; it is a brotherhood. These 600 men are a family. When the Amalekite raiders return to their camp, everyone in the camp celebrates in the victory; everyone shares in the spoils. Should David's men do any less?

(4) The battle is a team effort, with each member playing a different role. Just because 200 stayed behind does not mean they had no part in the victory. They stayed with the baggage (as I understand it, the baggage of the 600 men), and thus they contribute to the victory as well. Their victory is a collective victory, and so every man should have an equal share of the spoils.

David refuses to let these "**wicked and worthless men**" spoil the victory God has given. He sees to it that the spoils of war are evenly distributed among all 600 men. But the 600 do not get all the spoils of that victory. In verses 26-31, we see that David makes very good use of some of the spoils by sharing them with some of the Israelite towns he and his men frequented.

These towns may have been attacked by the Amalekites and suffered loss. If this is the case, some of the spoils may be their own property.

(1) These towns are towns David and his men frequented.

(2) These are some of the very towns David led Achish to believe he raided and plundered himself.

(3) Some of the men in these towns are elders; they are men of considerable influence.

(4) Some of the men in these towns are David's friends.

(5) These towns are Israelite towns; indeed they are in the territory of Judah. Thus, they are David's kinsmen.

(6) Very soon, these recipients of David's generosity will be among the first to embrace him as their king.

David's decision is far reaching, more so than he realizes at the moment. Many decisions are far reaching. He never imagined, for example, what the outcome would be for deciding to flee to the Philistines for safety. He never imagined the consequences of standing up to Goliath and killing him. In the heat of the moment, David had a decision to make. Should he give in to a few wicked and worthless men, letting them divide the spoils only among the 400? Or should he stand up for what is right? David chooses to stand for what is right, and in the process, he establishes a principle which outlives him. The good, or the evil, which we choose to do, sets a precedent for the future.

Conclusion

Lesson one: The Providence of God

How amazing is the providence of God! We see it so often and so clearly in 1 Samuel, and now in our text. The providence of God is His "unseen" hand in the events of life, assuring and achieving His purposes and promises. David had been chosen and anointed as Israel's next king. God protected David and provided for him and his men in amazing ways, ways we would not necessarily recognize as such at the time they are happening. We read that David is ready and willing to accompany Achish and the our Philistine commanders into battle. He appears to be greatly disappointed at being rejected by the other four commanders and sent back to Ziklag. Yet we can now see this is what made it possible for David and his men to attack the Amalekites and regain all they lost to these plunderers.

God provided guidance for David and his small army by means of the priest and the ephod, directing them that they should pursue the raiders, assuring them they would overcome them and rescue everything lost to them. But in addition to this guidance, God providentially arranged for an Egyptian slave of an Amalekite master to become so ill he would be left behind to die. In so doing, this man would be found and revived by David and his men. This man would then serve as a guide to direct them to the Amalekite campsite.

But wait; there's more! In the providence of God, the Amalekite raiders had seemingly attacked Ziklag last. They not only plundered Ziklag, but also a number of other Philistine and Israelite cities. David and his men not only

obtained their own goods back, but also the goods of many others. David shared this spoil with a number of Israelite towns, thus ingratiating him to these kinsmen of David. Ziklag was burned to the ground, the only unrecoverable loss. Yet this “loss” was instrumental in causing David to return very quickly to the land of Judah, where he was made King of Judah. All things do truly work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Lesson 2: The Principle of Grace

This is a most important principle, one that forces us to rethink and revolutionize our ministries as members of the body of Christ. The victory David and his men won over the Amalekites was really God’s victory. Men played a part in it, of course, but it was God’s victory in the final analysis. Men dare not claim the credit (or the rewards) for what God has done. This is no minor point. Do you remember what happened to Herod when he allowed men to praise him as though he were a god? He was smitten of God and died, because he did not give God the glory (see Acts 12:20-23). Jesus taught, **“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s”** (Matthew 22:21). We ought not take credit for those things which are of God, but give Him the glory. Paul clearly taught this principle as it applies to the spiritual gifts and ministries God gives to individual members of the body of Christ:

For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? (1 Corinthians 4:7)

Grace means that we do not have to work for God’s forgiveness, salvation, or blessings. All we have to do is receive what God, in grace, has provided for us. But grace also means that when we receive what we have not earned, we dare not take credit for it as though we earned it. The principle of grace means that men do not take credit for what God has done.

Lesson 3: The Principle of Plurality (or teamwork).

While God has given the victory, David and his men are very much a part of the battle. They are *all* a part of the battle. The 200 men who stay behind guard the baggage. Had the 200 men come along, they would have slowed down the 400, because they were weary. Had the 200 men not guarded the baggage, the 400 men would have been laden down. The 200 staying behind served the best interest of the 600. But every single one of the 600 made a contribution to the cause. It was a team effort.

In the church at Corinth, there were many divisions. Some divisions seem to be based on the fact that the Corinthians possessed different spiritual gifts. Some of these gifts were valued more highly than others. Those who possessed gifts thought to be more important became proud, looking down on those with allegedly lesser gifts. And those with supposedly lesser gifts began to think they were not really needed, perhaps not even a part of the body (1 Corinthians 12). Paul points out that all the gifts are gifts of grace, so no one can boast in what they are given. He also emphasizes that every gift plays an important role, and that all are necessary. The church is the body of Christ, and every individual member has a gift or gifts that facilitate a vital function in the body. Every member of the body is dependent upon the rest of the members of the body. No one is unimportant. Everyone is a part of a team. The work of our Lord – the work of the body of Christ, the church – can only be carried on as a part of a body, as the member of a team. Those who think individualistically think wrong.

Lesson 4: Lessons about Easter

Earlier I mentioned that this passage contains at least one Easter message. It is now time to make good on this claim. How can our text possibly relate to Easter? It is because the Bible, Old Testament or New, is about faith, and biblical faith is resurrection faith.

For the New Testament saint, faith in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is a vital, inseparable part of the gospel message we must believe:

8 But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”-- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (Romans 10:8-10; see 1 Corinthians 15:1ff.).

It is a faith that believes we, like Christ, will be raised from the dead:

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

These things we know, and we celebrate them every Easter. The Christian's faith is a resurrection faith. We know this is true for the New Testament saint. I

remind you that the Old Testament saint's faith was also a resurrection faith. We know this was true for Abraham:

16 For this reason *it is* by faith, that *it might be* in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the sight of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18 In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." 19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 23 Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 *He* who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:16-25).

As the writer to the Hebrews points out to us, it was also true of every Old Testament saint as well. Old Testament saints were saved by faith, and not by works -- this faith was a resurrection faith:

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; 18 *it was he* to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." 19 **He considered that God is able to raise *men* even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.** 20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. 21 **By faith**

Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff. 22 **By faith Joseph, when he was dying**, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones (Hebrews 11:13-22, emphasis mine).

From the very beginning of human history, God has been demonstrating that He is a life-giving God, a God who raises men from the dead:

(1) In the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, we read of God creating life.

(2) We have already seen that so far as having children was concerned, Abram and Sarai were “*dead*,” and yet God gave them a son (Romans 4:16-25). When God called on Abraham to offer up this son as a sacrifice, Abraham was willing to obey, trusting that God would raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

(3) Joseph’s brothers hated him and put him in a pit, planning to kill him. He was as good as “*dead*,” but God providentially brought a group of Midianite traders along who bought him as a slave. It looked hopeless for Joseph as a slave, and then as a condemned man in prison, but God gave this dead man life, so to speak, by raising him to the second highest position in Egypt (see Genesis 37ff.).

(4) The Israelites became Egyptian slaves and were cruelly treated and abused. The Pharaoh issued an order that all male Hebrew babies be cast into the Nile to die. Moses was as good as dead. And yet God arranged for the Pharaoh’s daughter to take Moses out of the river, thus nullifying Pharaoh’s order to kill the Hebrew boy babies. Through this rescued infant, God delivered the entire nation from Egypt, and the very powers that threatened the Israelites were drowned in the Red Sea (Exodus 1-15).

(5) Over and over again, neighboring enemies overran Israel, and their existence (life) was threatened; yet God raised up the judges (see the Book of Judges).

(6) Hannah is childless and barren, though she desperately wants a child: “She’s dead” so far as bearing a child, and yet God gives her Samuel, and then other sons and daughters (1 Samuel 1& 2)

(7) The Israelites are at war with the Philistines. They take the ark with them. Israel is defeated, Eli’s two sons are killed, Eli dies, and so does his daughter in law: I can just hear an Israelite murmur, “We’re dead.” But God gave the nation new life. He so afflicted the Philistines that they not only sent the ark of God back, they sent it back with “interest” (i.e. the gold; see 1 Samuel 4-6).

(8) The Israelites gather at Mizpah to renew their covenant with God; the Philistines are told of this large gathering of Israelites and wrongly assume it is some form of military action. They send a large army, which surrounds the Israelites. The Philistines have iron chariots and spears. The Israelites were surely thinking: “We’re dead!” But God sends an electrical storm, and the Philistines are defeated (1 Samuel 7).

(9) The Philistines occupy Israel, and Jonathan provokes them by attacking a Philistine garrison. A very large armed force comes to teach Israel a lesson. Saul has but 600 men left with him, because the rest deserted him. Many of the rest are thinking of how they can escape, too. Saul must be saying to himself, “I’m dead.” God uses the courage and faith of Jonathan to stage an attack on the Philistines, and then He sends an earthquake, which results in an Israelite victory over the Philistines (1 Samuel 13 and 14).

(10) The Philistines have come again to wage war with Israel. Goliath insults the Israelites and their God. Saul and his men are scared to death, and no one will stand up to Goliath. The Israelites, once again, are thinking, “We’re dead!” God sends them a young shepherd, who trusts in God and is not afraid to stand up to Goliath; through David God gives Israel new life (1 Samuel 17).

(11) David and his men are trapped by Saul on a mountain in the wilderness of Maon. Saul and his men are ready to spring the trap. As we read the account we cannot help but think, “They’re dead.” Suddenly, a messenger arrives to inform Saul that the Philistines have attacked, and he must leave. David and his men have new life (1 Samuel 23).

(12) Here in our text, David and his men have fled to Achish in Philistine territory to seek sanctuary from King Saul. David nearly has to go to war against Israel and for the Philistines; either that or he must turn against Achish. It seems there is no way out, and then, when David and his men are sent back home to Ziklag, we breathe a sigh of relief, only to learn that Ziklag has been raided by the Amalekites, and they have disappeared with all their families and possessions. “They’re dead,” we say to ourselves, “They’re history.” But God gives David faith, courage and guidance, and puts a half-dead slave in their path. By the end of this seemingly hopeless chapter, God has turned death into life.

(13) While Elijah hid from Ahab, King of Israel, he was cared for by a widow, who lived with her son. This son became sick and died, but through Elijah, God brought the child back to life (1 Kings 17:17-24). A very similar resurrection happened by the hand of Elisha, as described in 2 Kings 4.

(14) The prophet Jonah does not want to obey God and preach the gospel to the Ninevites, so he flees from Israel and boards a ship headed in the opposite direction of Nineveh. A violent storm threatens the ship Jonah is on, along with all its cargo and crew. Jonah tells them why the storm has come upon them and convinces the crew to throw him overboard. Jonah sinks below the waves for the last time and we, along with Jonah, say, "He's dead." But suddenly a great fish appears, swallows Jonah, and then later vomits him onto dry land. It is, as our Lord Himself noted, a prototype of His own resurrection (see Jonah; Matthew 12:38-40).

(15) Daniel and his three friends are Hebrew captives living in Babylon. They determine they will serve God, even if it means disobeying the most powerful king of their time. The king puts Daniel's three friends in a fiery furnace and casts Daniel into a den of lions: "They're dead," we say to ourselves. But God gives the three men a companion in that furnace and keeps them from being harmed by the flames and the heat. He shuts the mouths of the lions, who normally would have devoured Daniel. God loves to give life to those who are as good as dead. From the Old Testament, we see that He has been doing it since the beginning of man's history.

It is the same in the New Testament. God is constantly bringing life out of death:

(1) Elizabeth and her husband are elderly and cannot have children. God gives them a son, whom Zecharias names John. God brings life out of death.

(2) A young virgin named Mary is engaged to a man named Joseph, but is not yet married to him. She has never had sexual relations with a man. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God makes her pregnant with the promised Messiah. God brings life out of virtual death.

(3) A widow from the city of Nain has but one son, who dies and is being carried out to be buried. He is dead, literally. For those standing by, there is no hope. It's over for this fellow. And yet Jesus stops the funeral procession and commands the young man to arise, which he most certainly does. Jesus gives life to the dead (Luke 7:11-15).

(4) Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha, all of whom are friends with Jesus. Lazarus becomes gravely ill, and Jesus deliberately delays. By the time Jesus and His disciples arrive, Lazarus is not only dead, he has been in the grave for three days. He is really dead. But Jesus calls Lazarus out of that tomb, and he comes to life (John 11).

All of these and many more “death to life” experiences depicted in the Old and New Testaments are but a prelude to the “big one,” the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth comes and claims to be the Son of God. He lives a perfect life and interprets the Old Testament Scriptures as God meant them to be understood and practiced. The Jewish religious leaders, along with the help of the Roman officials, conspire against Jesus and crucify Him on the cross of Calvary. He is pronounced dead and buried in a tomb. “Jesus is dead,” the disciples sadly admit. It is all over. And then on the third day, they find that the tomb is empty, and they see the Lord Jesus risen from the dead. They are never again be the same. God raises Jesus from the dead.

Finding the resurrection theme (God brings life out of death) in the Bible is about as hard as finding Christ in Paul’s Epistles. The resurrection is a part of the fabric of faith and of the Scriptures. The important question is this: “Have you personally experienced the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Have you been brought from death unto life, by trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and for the gift of eternal life? The Bible tells us that we are “*dead in our transgressions and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1) apart from faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot ever please God by keeping His commandments. We must acknowledge our sin and the fact that we deserve God’s eternal wrath as the just punishment for our sins. By simply accepting the gift of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, we are born again, we experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ personally. From that point on, we live; we have eternal life. Have you received this gift of life? That is what Easter is all about. God has been in the business of making dead men live for centuries, and He can certainly do so for you.

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created

in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:1-10).

It is vitally important that you and I, at one time in our lives, come to faith in Jesus Christ, dying to sin and being raised to newness of life, in Christ. But this is not the end. The resurrection is more than a once in a lifetime experience. It is not enough to commemorate the resurrection of our Lord once a year. It is to be celebrated as a church every week (see 1 Corinthians 11:26; Luke 22:19; Acts 20:7). But even more than this, the resurrection is a way of life. The resurrection is to be lived and experienced daily by the Christian:

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:1-11).

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you (Romans 8:9-11).

There is yet one more Easter theme we should not overlook in our text. It should become clear in the light of Paul's words in Ephesians 4:

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS

TO MEN.” 9 (Now this *expression*, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Ephesians 4:7-16).

Paul is speaking here about spiritual gifts, which God gives to each and every believer in Jesus Christ. He is saying that these spiritual gifts – which are a divine enablement for ministry in and to the body of Christ, the church – are the result and expression of Christ’s victory over Satan and sin, through His death and especially His resurrection from the dead. When Jesus defeated Satan and sin, He gave gifts to His own, as a manifestation of His victory.

Paul draws our attention to the practice of military commanders as a result of their victory over their foes. He likens our Lord’s giving of spiritual gifts to His church to a military commander giving gifts to his men, because of their victory. I ask you, where in all the Bible is this more clearly done than right here in our own text? As David distributes the spoils of his victory over the Amalekites, he is foreshadowing the King of Kings, who gave “spiritual gifts” to His church as an indication of the magnitude of his victory.

Our God is a saving God, He is a life-giving God. And He gives life to those who are dead. No wonder He saves when we are yet “dead in our transgressions and sins.” No wonder we are to reckon ourselves dead, so that His life may be manifested in and through us. To God be the glory. He alone gives life to the dead.

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes (John 5:21).

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; 9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

1 Samuel 31

31. Saul's death

Verses 1-7. Saul's suicide

Verses 8-10. Saul's body dishonoured

Verses 11-13. The men of Jabesh Gilead recover the bodies

The Setting

(31:1-3)

1 Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 2 And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul. 3 And the battle went heavily against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was badly wounded by the archers.

When David and his men part company with the Philistines at Achish, the Philistines head north to Jezreel, while David and his men turn south toward Ziklag. I imagine each reaches their destination about the same time. This means that Saul and the Israelite army are fighting Philistines just about the same time David and his men are in pursuit of the Amalekite raiders. We know this is at least approximately the case since we are told that David learns of Saul's death on the third day after he and his men arrive back at Ziklag, victorious over the Amalekites (2 Samuel 1:1-2). God providentially removes David from this conflict by occupying his attention even farther to the south. David is thus not allowed to fight with or against the Philistines. It is God's will that in this battle between Israel and the Philistines, the Philistines will win and Saul and his sons will die in the battle.

Many tragic details of this battle are omitted. The men of Israel flee from the attacking Philistines. Many Israelite soldiers fall dead on Mount Gilboa; whatever defense shield they were to provide for Saul now collapses (remember 26:5). The Philistines begin to press their attack against Saul and his sons. Saul may have retreated to the highest, most protected spot on Mt. Gilboa, looking on

in terror while his sons attempt to provide a last line of defense for their father. This effort fails and the three sons of Saul lay dead as the archers spot Saul and begin to use him for target practice. None of Saul's wounds are instantly fatal, though Saul is no longer able to attack, much less defend, himself. It is only a matter of time, and Saul knows it.

Saul's Last Request

(31:4-6)

4 Then Saul said to his armour bearer, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and pierce me through and make sport of me." But his armour bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it. 5 And when his armour bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him. 6 Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armour bearer, and all his men on that day together.

Saul's "request" is really a command. He instructs his armor bearer to draw his sword and to run him through with it. This may not be such an unusual request, then or now. In the ninth chapter of the Book of Judges, Abimelech makes this same request. Abimelech is one of many sons of Gideon, though his mother is a concubine. He convinces his relatives in Shechem to make him their ruler, and then kills the 70 brothers **"on one stone"** (verses 1-5). The relationship between the leaders of Shechem and Abimelech turn sour, which results in a battle. Abimelech defeats the men of Shechem and surrounds the leaders in the city tower. Abimelech is in the process of burning them out when a woman drops an upper millstone from the tower, and it strikes Abimelech on the head. He is critically wounded and knows he is dying. To avoid the stigma of having been put to death by a woman, he orders his armor bearer to draw his sword and kill him. This young man obliges Abimelech, and he dies. Abimelech's death is far from noble and it is not a precedent to which any would likely appeal.

Saul is in a similar situation. A number of Philistine arrows find their mark, and Saul is critically wounded. One way or the other, Saul knows his death is near, and so he orders his armour bearer to finish him off. He gives two reasons for this, which he seems to feel are compelling: (1) He does not want to die at the hand of some **"uncircumcised"** heathen; and (2) he does not want his enemies to be able to make sport of him (verse 4). His reasons are not compelling enough for Saul's armor bearer, however. One would hope to hear a response from the armor bearer which mentions the fact that Saul is the **"Lord's anointed"** (compare 2 Samuel 1:14, 16). We cannot be certain therefore that the armor bearer refuses to act out of principle. We are told he fails to act out of fear. In fact, we are told he is *greatly afraid* (verse 4).

Saul is desperate. He has no strength left to fight the Philistines and very little strength to kill himself. There is one thing he can do; he can fall on his own sword, which he does. As I preached this message, at this point I am sure some of the congregation thought I had totally lost my senses, as I tossed my head back and laughed. Seeing puzzled looks from the audience, I explained that I couldn't help myself, because even here Saul cannot do it right. Saul missed! Can you imagine that? Not only does Saul miss David with his spear (at least twice) and Jonathan, he now cannot even hit the mark when aiming at himself.

I say this not because of what we read in chapter 31, but from what we read in 2 Samuel 1. We know from Amalekite's words that Saul does not finish the job of killing himself. This young man comes upon Saul, *leaning on his spear* (2 Samuel 1:6). Saul tries to do himself in and simply cannot do the job right. If God would not allow Saul to take the life of David, God's anointed, neither will He allow Saul to take his own life, for he too is God's anointed. What Saul's armor bearer will not do to Saul, he does to himself. The armor bearer dies, leaving Saul alone, at least for a moment.

The Aftermath of Defeat

(31:7-10)

7 And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, with those who were beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the cities and fled; then the Philistines came and lived in them. 8 And it came about on the next day when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 And they cut off his head, and stripped off his weapons, and sent *them* throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. 10 And they put his weapons in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

The author of our text uses a technique popular with writers of television dramas. Do you remember seeing television movies where the hero is in a very precarious spot, then suddenly something terrible happens, and the reader is left to assume the worst . . . all through the commercials? But somehow, after the commercial break, we discover the hero didn't really die as we had been led to assume. This is what our author does in our text. We are left to assume that Saul finishes himself off, followed thereafter by his armour bearer. Then, suddenly in chapter 1 of 2 Samuel, we find Saul is not really dead at all.

A young Amalekite comes to David with Saul's crown and bracelet and the story of how Saul finally dies. He arrives at Ziklag to inform David of Israel's

defeat by the Philistines and tells David he has escaped from the camp of Israel. He happened upon Saul he reports, and the king was leaning on his sword near death, but his life was still lingering. Saul begged him to come near and kill him, and the young man obliged. He then comes to David, thinking he might be rewarded. Surely David will be delighted to learn that his enemy is dead. This is the young man's second mistake of the day, and both of them cost him his life.

The death of Saul and his sons is reminiscent of the death of Eli and his sons in chapter 4. In both instances, death and defeat comes at the hands of the Philistines. In both cases, fathers and sons die in the same day. In both defeats, not only the leader dies, but many Israelites as well. The Philistines' victory is an individual disaster (for Saul and Eli, Saul's sons, and Eli's sons), and a national disaster (for Israel).

Clearly the author of our text is choosing to focus on Saul more than on his sons or the nation Israel. For example, we are not told how Jonathan dies, although we would very much like to know and although we would expect him to die like the champion he was, fighting to his last breath. Before we look at the way Saul dies, let us pause to recall that when Saul is killed, many Israelites also die, and many other Israelites turn and flee, as we are told in verse 7. Those on the other side of the valley and across the Jordan (who are not the focus of the Philistine attack) see the defeat of Israel and the death of Saul and his sons, and know there is no hope of defeating the Philistines. They flee for their lives, abandoning their cities, which the Philistines then occupy. This great defeat not only reduces the size of Israel's army, it reduces the size of Israel.

It is important to note here that Israel, as well as Saul, is being divinely disciplined. You may remember that Saul was the king the Israelites demanded in chapter 8, and that their demand to have a king was evidence that they had rejected God as their king (1 Samuel 8:7-8). It is not just for Saul's sins that Israel is defeated and many die; it is for Israel's sins as well. In 1 Samuel 12, Samuel very closely links the conduct and destiny of Israel and their king:

13 "Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you. 14 "If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. 15 "And if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the command of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, *as it was* against your fathers. 16 "Even now, take your stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes. 17 "Is it not the wheat harvest today? I will call to the LORD, that He may send thunder and rain. Then you will

know and see that your wickedness is great which you have done in the sight of the LORD by asking for yourselves a king.” 18 So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. 19 Then all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins *this* evil by asking for ourselves a king.” 20 And Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. 21 “And you must not turn aside, for *then you would go* after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile. 22 “For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself. 23 “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way. 24 “Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. 25 “But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king shall be swept away” (1 Samuel 12:13-25, emphasis mine).

In verses 8-10, we see that Saul does not get what he wants. He does not receive what he asks from his armor bearer in his two-fold request:

- (1) He does not wish to be killed by the uncircumcised.
- (2) He does not want anyone to make sport of him (perhaps like the Philistines did with Samson – Judges 16:23-25).

Saul is not granted his request. First, he is killed by the uncircumcised. Saul’s sword does not kill him nor does the sword of his armour bearer. The arrows of the Philistines (31:3) and the sword of the Amalekite (2 Samuel 1:9-10) kill Saul. Saul is indeed killed by uncircumcised hands. This is all as God meant it to be and how God said it would be:

17 “And the LORD has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. 18 “As you did not obey the LORD and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the LORD has done this thing to you this day. 19 “Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!” (1 Samuel 28:17-19)

It is not a matter of coincidence that Saul is killed by the hands of the Philistines (28:19) and by the hand of an Amalekite (28:18). A kind of poetic justice is

described here. Saul is reaping what he himself has sown. He is killed by uncircumcised hands because God said this was the way he would die. No matter how hard Saul tries to change his destiny, he cannot succeed at thwarting God's will or His word. Is his death not one more attempt to disobey God, one final act of rebellion?

Like the first, Saul's second request that his enemies not make sport of him is denied. First, Saul is hit by a number of Philistine arrows, which literally drain the life out of Saul. His slow, agonizing death is not a pretty sight. Saul does not go out looking good. After Saul is dead, his armor is stripped from his body and his head cut off. The Philistines must really enjoy this. And then they take Saul's armor and his head and parade them around their cities, taking them into the temple of their god. All of this mocks not only Saul, but his God. The final indignity for Saul is that his body, along with the bodies of his sons, is fastened to the wall of Bethshan. The indignities Saul suffers in death could hardly be worse.

One Bright Light – An Act of Heroism

(31:11-13)

11 Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and they came to Jabesh, and burned them there. 13 And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

This is not a pretty sight nor is it a "happily ever after" fairy tale ending. But it is how it all finally ends for Saul. Lest the reader be overcome with sadness over the indignities Saul suffers and the defeat and death which comes to Israel, the author gives a heart-warming account of a very courageous act on the part of the men of Jabesh-gilead. When these men learn that Saul and his sons have been killed, and that their bodies have been publicly displayed on the wall of Bethshan, they know what they must do. They march through the night to Bethshan and then return to Jabesh-gilead. This is probably more than a 20-mile round trip. They take down the bodies of Saul and his sons and carry them all the way back to Jabesh. There, they burn the bodies and then bury the bones under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh.¹⁷⁰

What prompts the men of this city to do that of which no one else has even thought? The people of this city hold fond memories of Saul and his contribution to them. The incident is described in 1 Samuel 11. Nahash, commander of the Ammonites, and his army besiege Jabesh-gilead and demand

their surrender. It is more than just an “unconditional surrender” he demands, however. He insists he gouge out the right eye of every Israelite in the city. The elders of Jabesh ask for some time to think about it and to appeal to their brethren for help. Word goes out to Israel and reaches Saul’s ear, who though he is still working at home, has been appointed king of Israel. Saul becomes angry in the Spirit and cuts up his oxen, sending pieces to every tribe in Israel. He warns that anyone who does not appear to defend Jabesh-gilead will find his oxen slaughtered as well. Israelites numbering 330,000 show up for battle, and the city of Jabesh is rescued.

The men of Jabesh do not forget what Saul did for them. In their hour of need, Saul came with the help that saved them. Now, in Saul’s hour of need, they find a way to help him. The bodies of Saul and his sons, suspended on the city wall of Bethshan, are there to be mocked. The men of Jabesh march through the night, take down the bodies of the king and his sons, and bring them back to Jabesh, where they bury them -- a magnificent gesture of appreciation and respect on their part. As Saul’s boldness toward the Ammonites at Jabesh is Saul’s finest hour (so far as 1 Samuel is concerned), this is the finest hour for the men of Jabesh.

Conclusion

Let us now highlight a few of the lessons this text holds for us, just as it held for the ancient Israelites.

First, should learn from Saul’s death, which is the central focus of our passage.

Saul died, just as God said he would. The timing of Saul’s death is precisely as predicted. Saul dies in the manner God said he would. He dies at the hands of the Philistines and an Amalekite. Saul dies in a manner entirely consistent with the way he lived his life. Even at the very end of his life, Saul does not really die like a man of courage. He does not want to suffer pain, and so he begs others to take his life and even tries to do so himself.

God’s word is absolutely reliable. God will do as He has promises. He will deal with sin and rebellion in judgment; He will deal with trust and obedience in blessing. Saul is removed from his throne and from life; David is preserved from Saul’s plots and soon installed as king of Judah (and then of Israel). Before the first man ever sinned, God declared that the penalty for sin was death (Genesis 2:16-17). From that point on, God has spoken clearly to men with respect to sin. His word not only defines sin, it spells out the consequences for sin – death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). God gave Saul time to repent, but he did not. And so his death came to pass, even as God had said. If you have never trusted in Jesus

Christ for salvation, God is now giving you opportunity to repent. You may, like Saul, choose to use this time for repentance as the opportunity to add to your sins. But be assured, your sins will find you out. The wages of sin is death. If you repent, by acknowledging your sin and trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, you will have eternal life. Be assured that God's promises – both of judgment and of salvation – are certain. Saul reminds us of this truth.

Second, we gain insight into our text as we consider the parallel text in 1 Chronicles 10:

13 So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry *of it*, 14 and did not inquire of the LORD. Therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse (1 Chronicles 10:13-14).

The first 12 verses of 1 Chronicles 10 are virtually identical with our text in 1 Samuel 31. Verses 13 and 14 (above) are not. These verses make several matters, implied in 1 Samuel, absolutely clear. In the final analysis, men did not put Saul to death (whether Philistine, Israelite, or Amalekite); it was God. And they also inform us that God put Saul to death because of his sin, his persistent sin. Finally, we are told that God put Saul to death not only to fulfill His warnings to him, but also to fulfill His promises to David.

Why does the author of 1 Samuel not include this statement? I think he believes we should figure that out for ourselves. How can we not reach this conclusion, based upon all that has been said and done before this chapter? But lest some fail to get the point, the conclusion we should reach is stated clearly in a parallel account so that no one can miss the point.

This passage directly addresses a problem that is very much in focus in our own day and time.

Let me just mention a name, and the issue should be evident: Dr. Jack Kevorkian. The issue is that of assisted suicide. In courts and legislative bodies in America, Canada, and elsewhere in the world, men are grappling with the issue of assisted suicide.

It would be helpful to our consideration if we were very clear on our definition of assisted suicide. I found this definition on the Internet, as I was doing a little research: Assisted suicide is the act of killing oneself intentionally with the assistance of another who provides the means, the knowledge, or both.

Assisted suicide is not the same thing as euthanasia. Euthanasia is taking the life of another, without their request or consent. Assisted suicide is initiated and

requested by the one who wishes to die. Assisted suicide is not allowing death to take its course naturally, by refusing special measures. Assisted suicide is causing the death of another, by taking special measures.

Saul requests assisted suicide. Our text makes it clear that he is wrong in so doing. He is wrong because he is attempting to minimize the pain of divine judgment. He is wrong because he is attempting to alter the means of divine judgment. He wants to die in a manner that is different from what God has foretold. He is wrong because he is trying to kill the Lord's anointed. As it was wrong for anyone else (like David, or the young Amalekite) to do harm to the king, it is wrong for the king himself. It is likewise wrong for the armour bearer of the king to take the king's life or for the young Amalekite to do so. The Amalekite paid for his sin with his life. Our text gives no sanction to assisted suicide. Both in Judges 9 and here, it is not the way to deal with pain, even though death is imminent in both cases.

It is important to recognize the hypocrisy in Saul's request to die as evident in his two requests, first of his armor bearer, and finally of the Amalekite. Let us put these two requests next to each other and compare them:

Then Saul said to his armour bearer, 'Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and pierce me through and make sport of me.' But his armour bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it. (1 Samuel 31:4)

Then he said to me, 'Please stand beside me and kill me; for agony has seized me because my life still lingers in me.' (2 Samuel 1:9)

Saul's second request exposes the hypocrisy of the first. The first request is made of Saul's armour bearer, who most certainly is an Israelite. He does not wish to be put to death by the **"uncircumcised."** Yet he requests an Amalekite (an uncircumcised Gentile) to put him to death. The real reason Saul wants to be assisted in committing suicide is given in his second request: he does not wish to suffer the pain. He wants to die to end the pain, to end his suffering. Bluntly, he is more interested in avoiding pain than in obeying God (not harming God's anointed). Just as Saul was willing to kill David because of the "pain" he caused him, now he is willing to kill himself because of the "pain" he is suffering.

It is wrong for Christians to commit suicide, whether assisted or not. It is wrong for Christians to assist in committing suicide. When men and women come to the place where they would rather die than live, we need to spend our efforts

pointing them to Christ, to eternal life. When Christians come to the place where death seems near and where pain is intense, we should look forward to being at home with the Lord, but not by our own hand. We need not allow medical technology to prolong pain and the death process, but we should not seek to end the life which God gives, and which only God takes away (Job 1:21). Whenever men wish to die in the Bible, it is not commended; it is clearly seen as a failure of faith.

There are undoubtedly some reading this message who have considered (or are considering) taking the easy way out. This text should speak clearly to you. But I would like to suggest that many others act in a very similar and sinful way, and don't recognize their actions as suicidal. Saul's sin, at heart, is trying to escape from the circumstances, the pain he created for himself and that God ordained as divine discipline. Saul wants to "avoid the pain" in a sinful manner, and many of us do too. Some seek to avoid pain spiritually. Paul believes in and practices supernatural healing. He petitions God to remove his own thorn in the flesh, but he is denied (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). God has a higher purpose for Paul's pain, and that is to humble him and to bring about even greater manifestations of His power and grace. Why will some saints not accept that God does not despise all pain, that He does not remove all pain, but purposes to use it for our good and His glory? Why do we seek to spiritualize our sin by acting as though our resistance to divinely sent pain is an act of faith? Let us not seek to escape what God gives us to endure.

There are other means of "escape" which are very common today, even among Christians. Some attempt to escape emotional pain by divorce or separation. Others, wishing to maintain the appearance of marriage, simply wall themselves off from their mate (and perhaps their family) to "avoid the pain." This, I suggest, is just another form of suicide. Illicit sexual relationships, drugs, alcohol, and other addictive patterns are, in reality, unbiblical, ungodly attempts to escape from pain. Whether it is the momentary thrill and pleasure of an illicit sexual experience or the high of drugs or alcohol, it is a momentary escape. But the Bible tells us that it is really suicidal in that it takes a step toward death (see Proverbs 7).

I have never liked the term "enabler" because it seeks to describe sin in secular rather than biblical terms. I wonder, however, if what some call an enabler is not the same as what Saul wishes his armor bearer to be, and what the Amalekite becomes – one who assists in suicide. To see a brother in sin, and not to act in a way that turns him from sin, is to aid him in his pursuit of death. Let us give serious thought to whether we enable the sin and death of others, or whether we encourage them to pursue the path of life, in Christ.

Finally, I see in Saul a very pronounced contrast to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Saul's sin and his desire to die is selfish, self-serving. His sin brings about not only his own death, but also the death of his sons and many Israelites, and the suffering of many more. Saul's leadership is not a blessing, but a curse to Israel. How different was the death of our Lord. It was not our Lord's desire to die, humanly speaking. He was not suicidal. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that this "**cup**" of death be removed from Him (Matthew 26:39). He died in obedience to the will of the Father, not in disobedience (Matthew 26:39; John 6:38; Philippians 2:3-8). *He did not die to save Himself from pain; He died to endure to the full the pain that we deserve as punishment for our sins* (Isaiah 53; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:17-18). This is why He refused the wine mingled with gall (Matthew 27:33-34). He was not willing to take any "medication" which would dull the pain He must bear on our behalf. His death is not a tragic failure on his part, which we try to forget (as with a suicide), but *a magnificent sacrifice for us*, which we celebrate every week at communion. His death was not self-serving, but sacrificial. *It was a death He suffered for our sins and for our salvation.* And all we need to do is to accept it as God's means for forgiving our sins and providing us with eternal life.

There is often a point of crisis to which God brings the sinner, a point at which suicide may be considered as a way out. People see the sin they have committed and feel hopelessly bound in the power, guilt, and consequences of these sins. They may think death (their death by suicide) is the only way out. It is not the way out, because death terminates our opportunity to repent and be saved:

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

The solution to your problem is not to die *in sin*; it is to die *to sin*. The only way you can do this is by faith in Christ -- as you acknowledge your sin and guilt and trust in Him who has died in your place, who has suffered the eternal pain for your sins. It is *in Christ* that you die *to sin*, and enter into eternal life. If you have never done this, I urge you to do it now. As God's promise of salvation is sure, so is His promise of judgment and eternal death. Let us learn from Saul's death.

Jesus in 1 and 2 Samuel

In 1st and 2nd Samuel we can see Jesus as the **Son of David** and hereby, as our great **High Priest, King and Intercessor**.

David was a man after God's own heart and Jesus as called 'The Beloved, in Whom was God's delight'. David was the only person in the Old Testament, whom the Bible defines as a prophet, priest and king at the same time. In Jesus, the fullness of the Godhead dwelled bodily, in character, ministry gifts, fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

But even before the time of David, the prophet Sam-uel, who wrote those two books, was anointed by the Lord to such an extent, that the Bible says:

"So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." (1 Sam 7:13)

Now we know that Jesus is the **Anointed One** (That's what the Greek word for 'Christ' means actually) and His anointing can definitely protect us in much the same way, from all our enemies. During all the days of the life of this Old Testament prophet of God, Israel was saved from its enemies, and during all the days of the reign of Jesus (that would be eternally), we – His people, are and always will be under His saving, healing, and delivering hand of protection.

Samuel can be considered a type of Christ in one more way – the Bible says none of his words fell to the ground (1 Sam 3:19) and Jesus is called '**The Word**'.

Isn't it so amazing how the Lord can be seen in His people – His Body? Individually, we can exhibit and reveal bits and pieces of His mantle, but corporately, as a Body of Christ, we can have the fullness of His power, grace and glory. Amen!



Remains of the Roman theatre at Bet Shean. It was on the walls of this town that Saul's body was hung





Hebron where David was anointed King of Judah



Between Bethlehem and Hebron – Three Reservoirs

Brief Study on 2 Samuel

The Monarchical Era

In God's original promise to Abraham, He promised to bless the patriarch, giving him an innumerable posterity. God promised to give Abraham a great name and make him a blessing through his posterity. It is the promise regarding these promised descendants in Genesis 12:2 that is amplified in the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12-16. God promised David that he would have a son, Solomon, who would establish his throne; moreover, David's lineage would be perpetuated, ultimately issuing in the kingdom rule of Messiah, who would have a political kingdom, an earthly rule that would endure forever.

General Information on 2 Samuel

James C. Turro² writes: "It is not possible to date with precision the origin of 1-2 Samuel. In part, these books undoubtedly contain very old materials, some dating from the first years of the monarchy in Israel. The Narrative of Succession (2 Sm 9-20) is an example of such early documentation. It was probably fixed in written form soon after the events that it narrates took place. The entire work was probably given its definitive shape—allowance made for some later additions and retouching—shortly before, or during, the Exile. This final restyling was accomplished under D influence, reflected especially in I Sm 2:27-36 and 2 Sm 7." (*The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 163)

David M. Gunn³ writes: "Most commonly accepted of the ideas about sources is the view that chaps. 9-20 together with 1 Kings 1-2 was originally a separate

² Monsignor James C. Turro, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Seton Hall University, where he also served for 45 years as the director of the seminary's library. In gratitude for his endless work in overseeing the preservation and development of the library, it was renamed in his honor in 2007. Monsignor Turro is a gifted university professor, spiritual director, and retreat leader, and is in high demand internationally as a lecturer. Among his books are: *Conversion: Reflections on Life and Faith*, and *Reflections: A Path to Prayer*. He is also the author of the popular "Your Word is a Lamp" monthly column in the *Magnificat* magazine.

³ David Gunn has held the A. A. Bradford Chair in Religion since 1993. He is a Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scholar and has taught previously in the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield in England (1970-1984) and at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia (1984-1993). He grew up in New Zealand and Australia and has a

document. This 'story of King David' is often referred to as the 'court history' or 'succession narrative,' since some have seen the struggle between David's son to succeed him on the throne as its primary theme. A case has been made for including most of chaps. 2-4 (the war between David and Saul's son Ishbosheth) with this material and possibly part of chaps. 6 (David and Michal) and 7 (the promise of a Davidic dynasty). But where this postulated document originally began is uncertain." (*Harper's Bible Commentary*, p. 287)

J. Alberto Soggin⁴ writes: "The 'succession narrative', II Sam. 9-20 (perhaps preceded by 21.1-14 and ch. 24, cf. the question in 9.1, which is probably a reference to the episode described in 21.1ff., and the beginning of 24.1ff., the form of which is similar to that of 21.1ff.) and I Kings 1-2, is a historiographical work of remarkable importance. After the classic study by L. Rost, the narrative has often been considered to be one of the earliest history writings in the world, if not the earliest. The author is a supreme storyteller and sees history as a series of inter-connected events linked by a chain of cause and effect, and at the same time dominated by the concept of divine recompense. In this sense, then, we have a precursor of Deuteronomy. The narrative begins with a few factual details: David sought to possess the wife of one of his generals, Uriah the Hittite, and did not hesitate to have the latter killed to remove the impediment to his marriage. Now comes retribution: as David has destroyed the family of Uriah, so his own family is to be destroyed by the divine judgment (cf. the speech by the prophet Nathan in II Sam. 12.7-12). The criterion which unifies this historiography is thus the hand of God, who is the real protagonist in the history: he guides it even in its less edifying aspects (cf. also II Sam. 11.27 and 17.14). For the rest, however, we have a secular history and a principle of approach which is fundamental for any scientific history. On the other hand, it

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⁴ Jan Alberto Soggin was a leading Italian Biblical scholar. He took his first degrees in law at the Sapienza University of Rome and in theology at the Waldensian Theological Seminary in Rome. He became professor for Old Testament, Hebrew, and Greek at the University of Buenos Aires, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and then until his retirement at the Waldensian Theological Seminary and at the Sapienza. Among other things he was a fellow at Princeton Theological Seminary, at St John's College, Cambridge and at the Hebrew University. He lectured widely and published various articles and books. He was a member of the editorial board of *Henoch*, *Vetus Testamentum* and of *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. Also known as Alberto Soggin; born on 10 March 1926 (87 years ago); died on 27 October 2010

has recently been noted that the narrative is rich in elements which by their nature cannot be subjected to historical investigation: not only the concept of divine reward and punishment, an anticipation of Dtr and a feature common to all Near Eastern and Israelite wisdom, which believes in a cosmic order of which Yahweh is the guarantor in Israel, but also other aspects cannot be verified in any way. For example, in v. 9b it is expressly said that there are no witnesses to the conversation between Ammon and his half-sister Tamar (II Sam. 13.10ff.) in the bedroom where the former is pretending to be ill, but the conversation is reported in its entirety. This is a typical example of what we shall be discussing. Thus although the narrative refers to historical events, it is not properly historical, but rather a historical novel which attempts to penetrate into the makeup of the people it describes and which bases its approach on a fundamental theme of wisdom: that no one can escape the laws of the world order which have been laid down by Yahweh. Furthermore, it is a story with an obvious message: that Solomon *is* the legitimate successor to David and willed by Yahweh. Notwithstanding these reservations, however, it is difficult to deny that the account bears witness to the way in which Israel struggled to gain an understanding of history as a world-wide phenomenon, an interest which we do not find among any other people at this time (with the brief exception of the Hittites)." (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 192-193)

Jay G. Williams⁵ writes: "The David of Samuel, unlike the David of Chronicles, is hardly a man who spends most of his time worrying about cultic affairs. He is a vigorous general, a virile and sometimes lustful hero, and a keen politician. At the same time, the David of Samuel is a fervently pious man who does more than simply manipulate religion for the benefit of the state. His dancing before the ark in an 'uncovered' state is just one example of his enthusiasm for Yahweh and his cult." (*Understanding the Old Testament*, pp. 173-174)

Samuel Sandmel⁶ writes: "We read in II Samuel 21:19 that the slayer of Goliath was a certain Elkanan. Legend transferred the achievement to David; gowing

⁵ Jay G Williams, Professor Jay G. Williams received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and has taught at Hamilton College since 1960. He has published widely in Biblical Studies, Buddhism, and Daoism. He is also a published poet and an exhibitor of Thomas Nast political cartoons.

⁶ Prof. Sandmel was a Jewish student of the New Testament, and wrote many important and interesting things. But this essay was a virtual bombshell, in which he critiqued the ambiguous usage of the term "background" in New Testament studies. He deftly demonstrated that the term "parallel" has almost no legitimate usages, and many illegitimate ones (such as suggesting that because two ancient texts exhibit some similarity, one

legend took two forms—the one of making the Goliath incident the occasion for the meeting of Saul and David; the other, since they have presumably met, ascribes it to a development in David's life at the court." (*The Hebrew Scriptures*, p. 447)

James King West⁷ writes: "David's reign not only established the broad patterns for Israel's four centuries of monarchical rule, but produced as well significant and lasting concepts of the divinely appointed role of the king, the nation, and the city of Jerusalem in the future destiny of world history. In southern tradition, most especially, David took a place alongside Abraham and Moses as the recipient of a covenant with Yahweh which assured for his descendants an everlasting kingdom. This comes to expression in II Samuel 7, in Nathan's promise to the king: 'And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.' [II Sam. 7:16] The same theme recurs in the poem of II Samuel 23:1-7 and is reflected in a great many references and allusions in later Old Testament passages, particularly in the royal Psalms. A royal theology developed which was sufficiently bold to refer to the king as God's (adopted) 'son' and 'annointed' (*mashiah*), and, alongside it, a tradition of Zion (Jerusalem) as God's 'holy hill' and 'resting place forever.' Long after the collapse of the monarchy, the hope continued to live on in the messianic expectation of a future deliverer prince who would reign over God's people from Zion." (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 195-196)

Introduction to 2 Samuel

In the Jewish canon, First and Second Samuel were regarded as one book; but it is obvious that Samuel was not its author beyond chapter 25. The remainder has been ascribed to different authors, hut common consent, I believe, has fastened on Nathan or Gad (1 Chron. 29 : 29). Do not leave the consideration. of Samuel altogether, without engaging in a character study of that wonderful man. One of the greatest in the Bible is he. See how God Himself estimated him in Jeremiah 15 : 1.

The book now under contemplation is chiefly concerned, as you have discovered, with the history of David, the facts of whose life need to be gotten well in mind for two reasons. (1) Because of the large place he occupies in sacred story as the great ancestor and type of Christ, and (2) in order to

influenced the other in some way). In some senses, this essay also has the effect of being a critique of some aspects of the so-called "inter-textual" interpretation of the New Testament.

⁷ Wrote "The Introduction to the Old Testament." (No profile found)

understand and utilize the Psalms. One-half of the book of Psalms at least, was written by David ; and written with reference to various occasions and experiences in his life. To understand many of their allusions, therefore, how needful to understand the circumstances giving rise to them? Moreover, unless we understand those allusions how can we extract the real comfort from the Psalms either for ourselves or others? The titles of some of the Psalms tell us when they were written, and this, of course, is a great aid ; but in many cases the origin or connection only can be grasped by carefully reading the Psalm in the light of the whole story of David's life. As a single illustration of the latter circumstance, read over again the story of David's connection with the city of Keilah in 1 Samuel, and then compare Psalm 31 for a possible likeness.

For the above reasons, it would be advisable to review 1 Samuel, especially chapters 16 to 26, which treat so largely of David's early history. For example, become familiar with his genealogy and connected topics. What was his father's name? The name of his

His birth-place ? What were the facts or incidents of his infancy? Go over again the larger events under the head of his persecution. Recall Goliath, Jonathan, Ahimelech, Adullam, Saul's deliverances at his hands, Ziklag, etc.

The Division of Second Samuel

The second book of Samuel contains the history of David after Saul's death, his reign over Judah and over all Israel , as well as the great events which transpired during his reign. The centre of the book is the record of his fall, the chastisements which he had to pass through as a result of his sin and his subsequent restoration after the rebellion of his son Absalom. The last four chapters form an appendix in which various episodes in David's life are recorded; it tells us of the victories of the King. Much in this book, even more so than in the previous history, has a typical meaning, which we shall follow as far as the purpose of our annotations permits. We make the following division:

I. DAVID KING OF JUDAH AND THE EVENTS OF HIS REIGN

1. David's Lamentation for Saul and Jonathan (1:1-2)
2. David Anointed King over Judah (2:1-7)
3. Abner's Revolt and the War which Followed (2:8-32)
4. Abner's Deeds and End (3:1-39)

5. The Death of Ish-bosheth (4:1-12)

II. DAVID KING OVER ALL ISRAEL AND THE EVENTS OF HIS REIGN

1. David Anointed King Over All Israel (5:1-5)

2. David's Conquest of Zion and Victory Over the Philistines (5:6-25)

3. The Ark Brought to Zion (6:1-23)

4. The Lord's Promise to David and the Covenant (7:1-29)

5. The Extension of His Kingdom (8:1-18)

6. David and Mephibosheth (9:1-13)

7. The War with Ammon and Syria (10:1-19)

III. DAVID'S SIN, CHASTISEMENTS AND RESTORATION

1. David's Great Sin (11:1-27)

2. The Message of God and David's Confession. The Beginning of the Chastisements (12:1-31)

3. Further Chastisement: Amnon, Tamar and Absalom (13:1-39)

4. David and Absalom (14:1-33)

5. Absalom's Conspiracy and David's Flight (15:1-37)

6. The Sorrows and Testings of the King (16:1-23)

7. Absalom, Ahitophel and Hushai (17:1-29)

8. The Civil War and Absalom's Death (18:1-33)

9. The Return of the King (19:1-43)

10. The Revolt of Sheba (20:1-26)

IV. THE APPENDIX TO THE HISTORY OF DAVID

1. The Famine and the Wars with the Philistines (21:1-22)
2. David's Song of Deliverance (22:1-51)
3. The Last Words of David and the Record of the Mighty Men (23:1-39)
4. David's Failure: the Altar on the Threshing Floor of Araunah (24:1-25)

Analysis and Various Annotations

I. DAVID KING OF JUDAH AND THE EVENTS OF HIS REIGN

1. David's Lamentation for Saul and Jonathan

CHAPTER 1

1. The Death of Saul and Jonathan announced to David (1:1-10)
2. David's great Grief (1:11-12)
3. The Amalekite slain (1:13-16)
4. David's Lamentation (1:17-27)

1. David's lament for Saul and Jonathan

Verses 1-16. The Amalekite's report of Saul's death

Verses 17-27. David lament.

David heard of the death of Saul and Jonathan from the lips of the Amalekite, who also brought him the crown and the bracelet of the dead king. The story of this young man has been branded by some as a falsehood, invented to gain favor from David. It is not necessary to reconcile the supposed contradiction of the Amalekite's story with the account of Saul's death in the last chapter of the preceding book, by saying the Amalekite lied to David. We have explained this in the annotations of chapter 31. When the Amalekite said to David, "So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen," he referred to the fact that Saul had fallen upon his own sword, in committing suicide and was in great suffering. And great was David's grief when he hears the sad news. He and his companions wept and fasted in mourning over Saul, Jonathan and the people of the Lord.

Then he commanded the Amalekite to be slain because he had smitten the Lord's anointed; thus he honoured Saul in his death, while the Amalekite received the punishment for his deed. Then David broke out in his great lamentation over Saul and Jonathan. The eighteenth verse as given in the authorized version is unintelligible. The Hebrew reads "and he bade them teach the children of Judah the bow;" the words "the use of" are supplied. Others read instead "the song of the bow" and claim it has reference to this lamentation, which David taught Judah . (See verse 22.)

The book of Jasher (the upright) is never mentioned again (Joshua 10:12-14). The lamentation of David is a wonderful outpouring of soul. First he speaks of the calamity which has come to Israel in the death of Saul and Jonathan (verses 19-22); then he extols the virtues of both. What grace this manifests if we consider that Saul had hunted David and put upon him so many afflictions! He does not refer to it in a single word. Beautiful beyond description are his loving words on Jonathan.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: Very pleasant hast thou been unto me. Thy love to me was wonderful, Passing the love of women.

But there is one whose love is greater than David's love for Jonathan, even our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. David Anointed King over Judah

CHAPTER 2:1-7

2. David made king of Judah and Abner's revolt

Verses 1-7. David anointed king over Judah

Verses 8-11. Abner sets up Ish-Bosheth as king

Verses 12-17 Abner's killing of Asahel precipitated a blood feud between Joab and Abner

Verses 22-23. David's forces were victorious.

Verses 29-32. This initial victory presaged further victories

1. David's inquiry of the Lord (2:1-3)

2. Anointed king over Judah (2:4)

3. His message to the men of Jabesh-gilead (2:5-7)

The first thing mentioned of David after his lamentation over Saul and Jonathan is that he inquired of the Lord. He would not do a single step towards claiming the rights which belonged to him without consulting the Lord. It shows how David, with all his faults, was in submission to the Lord. He waits on the Lord ready to follow His guidance and in this David acknowledged his complete dependence on Him who had chosen him as His King over His people. In this he is a type also of our Lord Jesus. The answer came to him at once that he was to go up into the cities of Judah . Then the men of Judah came and anointed him king over the house of Judah . There is nothing ostentatious about it nor does he take any steps whatever to extend his God-given rights beyond the tribe of Judah . His first act as king was to thank the men of Jabesh-gilead for the kindness they had done in the burial of Saul. He also exhorted them to be strong and announced his kingship over Judah .

3. Abner's Revolt and the War which Followed

CHAPTER 2:8-32

1. Abner makes Ish-bosheth king over Israel (2:8-11)

2. The defeat of Abner (2:12-17)

3. Abner and Joab and Joab's victory (2:18-32)

God's king began his reign in quietness, and opposition and open revolt followed at once. Abner, who had been the captain of Saul's host, took a son of Saul by the name of Ish-bosheth and made him king in Gilead . The original name of this son was "Esh-baal," which means "the fire of Baal" (1 Chronicles 8:33). "Ish-bosheth" was his other name; it means "man of shame." He seems to have been a weakling and a tool in Abner's hand. Ish-bosheth's influence was soon extended over all Israel and the false King ruled, while David was only acknowledged by the faithful men of Judah . David's reign over Judah was seven years and six months. Here are faint hints of what will be repeated in the future history of Israel . Another Ish-bosheth, a pretender to the throne of Israel , the false king, will be in the earth. He comes in his own name, with no claim whatever to the throne. And the true King, like David, will only be acknowledged by a faithful remnant of his people. The seven years and a half remind us of the last period of Israel 's history when these things come to pass. However, Ish-bosheth's weakness and especially his end makes a fuller application on these lines impossible.

The other prominent person is Joab, the son of Zeruiah, who went out with the servants of David. (Joab was David's nephew. See 1 Sam. 26:6; 1 Chronicles 2:16.) They met Abner's force about six miles northwest of Jerusalem by the pool of Gibeon . Then followed at Abner's suggestion a conflict between twelve young men of Benjamin, the subjects of Ish-bosheth, and twelve of David's servants. A wicked scene followed. They slaughtered each other at Helkathhazzurim, "the field of sharp swords," after which there was a severe battle which ended with the defeat of Abner. All this shows the sorrowful conditions which existed among Israel , foreshadowing again the worse conditions throughout this age and especially at the close of it. Then follows the record of the three sons of Zeruiah, Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Asahel followed hard after Abner and though repeatedly warned by Abner, continued in his pursuit till Abner in self-defense slew him. The battle ended with the loss of nineteen servants of David and Asahel, while Abner lost 360 men. "Shall the sword devour forever?" was Abner's question. As long as God's true King does not occupy the throne, ruling in righteousness and in peace, wars and bloodshed will continue. The sword cannot be stopped till He reigns. In His coming kingdom nations will learn war no more and beat their swords into plowshares.

4. Abner's Deeds and End

CHAPTER 3

3. Abner's defection to David and his death

Verses 1-11. Quarrel with Ish-Bosheth

Verses 12-30. Abner goed over to David

Verses 31-39. David's lament over Abner

1. The long war and its results (3:1)
2. David's family (3:2-5)
3. Abner's defiant deed (3:6-7)
4. Abner and Ish-bosheth (3:8-11)
5. Abner's defection to David (3:12)
6. David's request (3:13-16)

7. Abner with David (3:17-22)

8. Abner's end (3:23-30)

9. David's lamentation over Abner (3:31-39)

3. Abner's defection to David and his death

Verses 1-11. Quarrel with Ish-Bosheth

Verses 12-30. Abner goes over to David

The first verse speaks of the long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David waxed stronger and stronger. The weakness of the king in giving way to the flesh is next faithfully recorded; his self-indulgence in his different marriages. Alas! he began his sowing in the flesh from which later he was to reap such a sad harvest. Six sons are mentioned, born to David by his six wives. Three of these sons became a source of sorrow and grief to him. Ammon's vile deed is found in chapter 13.

Absalom was a still greater trial to him, Adonijah became the rival of Solomon (1 Kings 1:5). In this record of taking these different women as wives, in this gross indulgence of the flesh, he prepared himself for the great sin of his life. Disorder and much confusion followed. Abner's deed in taking Rizpah insulted Saul's house and Ish-bosheth protested and Abner's fury came upon the weakling whom he had made king. Then suddenly Abner professed belief in David's God-given kingdom. His arrogant pride is seen in verse 10; as if it was in his power to set up the throne of David over all Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba. The poor counterfeit king was silenced. Then we see Abner entering negotiations with David. Had David again relapsed that he fell in with Abner? We do not hear a word that he inquired of the Lord. He makes a condition under which Abner is to see his face. Michal, Saul's daughter, the first wife he had, who was now the wife of Phaltiell is to be brought to him. He then received her after his request to Ish-bosheth, while her husband accompanied her as far as the border of Judah. The subsequent history, Michal's mockery, shows that it was a mistake for David to take her back. How different all would have been if David had inquired of the Lord.

Abner, the shrewd schemer, was then entertained by David in a great banquet at which occasion he offered to make David ruler over all Israel. And David listened and sent him away in peace. But was it God's way and God's plan to have His anointed made king through such an instrument? Abner's death frustrating his plans gives the answer. Joab, moved by envy, jealousy and bitter

hatred, slew Abner in the same way as he had slain his brother Asahel. He died for the blood of Asahel he had shed. An insinuation is made as if Joab's deed was justified as the avenger. This however could not be sustained by the law for Abner's death in slaying Asahel was in self-defence. But David cleared himself from so abominable a deed. "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD forever from the blood of Abner." A public mourning is instituted in which Joab is forced to partake and the king lamented over Abner. "And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people." The king's wise behaviour had its effect upon the people and thus his kingdom was strengthened.

5. The Death of Ish-bosheth

CHAPTER 4

4.Ish-Bosheth's death

Verses 1-7. Ish-Bosheth's assassination

Verses 8-12. David's punishment of the murderers

1. Ish-bosheth in despair (4:1-3)
2. Mephibosheth, the lame son (4:4)
3. The end of Ish-bosheth (4:5-8)
4. The punishment of the murderers (4:9-12)

Abner's death meant the speedy end of Ish-bosheth's pretentious reign. Baanah and Rechab were his captains and became his murderers. While Ish-bosheth was resting in the heat of the day they sneaked in and murdered the sleeping son of Saul, then brought the head to David. They claimed to be instruments of God in the execution of the wicked deed, expecting approval and a reward from David. But the king received them in a different way. Here David's trust in Jehovah breaks through the dark clouds and the King's heart is revealed. "As the LORD liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity." He acknowledges the Lord's gracious help in the past and his present confidence in Him. His case had rested in Jehovah's hands and in the ghastly deed of the two captains the King did not see Jehovah's intervention in his behalf, but he looked upon them as murderers. Swift judgment was executed upon them. David is now through these circumstances the sole and undisputed claimant of the throne of Israel and his anointing as king over all Israel must speedily follow. Through all the sad

occurrences since Abner had made Ish-bosheth king, David had maintained his integrity. In all the evil deeds, the bloodshed and cold-blooded murders he had no part. He acted in justice. In this at least he is a type of Him who will reign over the earth in righteousness.

We must not overlook verse 4 in which Jonathan's son Mephibosheth is mentioned for the first time. He was the only representative of Saul's line, a helpless cripple. His story and David's kindness to him we shall soon follow.

II. DAVID KING OVER ALL ISRAEL AND THE EVENTS OF HIS REIGN

1. David Anointed King over all Israel

CHAPTER 5

5. David made king over Israel; captures Zion

Verses 1-5. God's king comes into his own

Verses 6-25. David's conquest of Zion and other victories

CHAPTER 5:1-5

1. David anointed king over all Israel (5:1-3)

2. Duration of his reign (5:4-5)

The events of the reign of David over Judah had a beneficial effect upon all Israel. After Ish-bosheth's death all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron. It is a blessed scene when they appear to anoint him King over all Israel. 1 Chronicles 12 should here be consulted. In that chapter the names of those are given who stood by David. In verse 38 we read: "All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king." The coming of all Israel to Hebron was one of the most magnificent spectacles in the history of the nation. One only needs to take a pencil and add the numbers mentioned in 1 Chron. 12:24-37 to find what a great army had gathered to make David king. There were 1222 chiefs and 339,600 men. Here we see a united Israel swept by a tremendous enthusiasm. Now they own him as their own bone and flesh; the victories of the past are remembered as well as the divine promise that he, David the Bethlehemite, should be the shepherd of Israel as well as their captain.

But there is coming for Israel a greater day than the day in Hebron , when they anointed David king. It foreshadows but faintly the glorious day when their long rejected King-Messiah, the Son of David, comes again. Then they will own Him and He will own them. They will also know and remember all God has done through Him. He will then indeed be the Shepherd and King of Israel . All this and much more is foreshadowed in David's coronation and his reign. David is the type of the coming reign of our Lord as "King of Righteousness" while Solomon and his reign typify Him as "King of Peace." And David made a covenant with them in Hebron as the Lord Jesus will enter into covenant with the nation in the day of His return.

Then the duration of David's reign is given. Seven years and six months he reigned over Judah and over all Israel and Judah 33 years. The record here does not speak of the great feast which was made at Hebron . We find this also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 12:39-40. It is typical of the time of joy and rejoicing in Israel and throughout the world, when the true King has come. Then the great feast of which Isaiah speaks will take place (Is. 25:6-10).

2. David's Conquest of Zion and Victory over the Philistines

CHAPTER 5:6-25

1. David's conquest of Zion (5:6-10)
2. Hiram King of Tyre (5:11-12)
3. David's additional concubines and wives (5:13-15)
4. The victory over the Philistines (5:17-25)

Zion is closely linked with David's anointing as king over all Israel . Here 1 Chronicles 11 must be read for a more complete account of what took place. Jerusalem is now to become the capital of the great kingdom. The oldest name was Salem ; the name of Jebus was given to it by the Jebusites (Judges 19:10). After David's conquest the ancient name was restored and it became known as Jerusalem ("habitation of peace"). The town had previously been taken (Judges 1:8) but the stronghold of the upper city, Mount Zion , remained in the hands of the Jebusites. David took the stronghold. Jebusite means "the one who treads down." It reminds us of the words of our Lord, " Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

Jerusalem and Zion are still trodden down by the Gentiles. The day is coming when the King will end all this. Jerusalem is yet to be "the city of the great

King." (Ps. 48). Here we have once more a prophetic foreshadowing of what will take place, only on a larger scale, when He, who is greater than David, begins His long promised reign in the midst of His people. After this we shall find much more about Zion , especially in the prophets and in the psalms. It is the place Jehovah has chosen (Ps. 132:13-14). To this place, where his throne was, David also brought the ark. When our Lord establishes His kingdom, Zion will be the glorious and the beautiful Place. "This is my rest forever; here will I dwell; I have desired it" (Ps. 132:14). Then He will bless out of Zion (Ps. 128:5); and out of Zion shall go forth the law (Is. 2:3). He will be enthroned upon the holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6); the rod of His strength cometh out of Zion (Ps. 110:2); Zion will be the joy of the whole earth (Ps 48:2).

Then Hiram, the King of Tyre, is mentioned. He sent messengers to David, as well as cedar trees, carpenters and masons, and they built David a house. It must be understood that we have in this and the events which follow not a strict chronology. The children mentioned here were born at a later period. All is put in here to show how David grew great and that the Lord was with him. Hiram, the Gentile king, and the messengers he sent, are typical of that day, when our Lord reigns in Zion and "the Kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents"--when all nations shall serve Him (Ps. 72:10-11).

The Hebrew names of the eleven sons of David are of deep significance. It seems the story of the redemption which is in Him, whom David foreshadows, is made known in these names. Shammuah (heard); Shobab (returning); Nathan (he is given); Solomon (peace); Ibhar (the Lord chooses); Elishua (my God is salvation); Nepheg (budding); Japhia (glorious); Elishama (God heareth); Eliada (whom God knoweth); Eliphalet (my God is escape). This is a most blessed revelation contained in those names; and some Christians can say there is no meaning in names! Read them in their meaning and ponder over each as telling forth the very gospel story from start to finish.

Twice David enquired of the Lord concerning the Philistines. Once he is told to go up and the Lord gave him the victory and he burned the images of the Philistines. It is another picture of how the coming King will make an end of idolatry. Again he asked the Lord and was told not to go up. Then the Lord smote the Philistines Himself. In all David was obedient.

3. The Ark Brought to Zion

Archaeological light

The eastern hill where the Jebusite fortress was located was practically impregnable (2 Sam 5:6). It was located above the Gihon spring. Some scholars still maintain David's *mes* gained access through the water shaft which was dug by the Jebusites to get water inside the city (cf. 5:8, RSV). Early researches of the Palestine Exploration Fund under the direction of Sir Charles Warren yielded important discoveries concerning this Jebusite water system. W. F. Albright, however, maintains the wall was scaled by a grappling hook and that this is the meaning of the word (as shown by Aramaic and Arabic) instead of water shaft. A third possibility is that David's men blocked up the water shaft, thus denying the besieged city its only water supply.



Mount Zion, the site of the City of David



Africa, Ethiopia, Axum The Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion said to house the Biblical Ark Of The Covenant. The Ark is brought out for “The Timket Ceremony January 18 2009.”



Tel Aviv – Boy reads from the Torah

CHAPTER 6

6. The ark brought to Zion

Verses 1-11. The son of Uzziah

Verses 12-19. The ark brought to David's city

Verses 20-23 Michal's mockery

1. The ark fetched by David (6:1-5)
2. Uzzah: his error and death (6:6-9)
3. The ark in the house of Obed-edom (6:10-11)
4. The ark brought into David's city (6:12-19)
5. Michal's mockery of David (6:20-23)

It is of importance to read 1 Chronicles 13 for a better understanding of how the ark was brought from Kirjathjearim to David's city. The book of Chronicles contains these larger records because in that book these events are described in their theocratic character, while in Samuel the outward aspect of David's kingdom is followed. David issued the call that the people with the priests and

the Levites should gather to bring again the ark of God (1 Chron. 12:2-3). However we do not read anything more about the Levites, who alone were commissioned to carry the ark. It is evident that David neglected to follow the divine instructions given in the law concerning the handling of the ark. (See Numbers 4.) This neglect may be traced to the fact that David did not inquire of the Lord. The way they transported the ark was the way of the Philistines (1 Sam. 6:7). When Uzzah put forth his hand to steady the ark, he was smitten for his error and died. God had spoken to His people and taught them the lesson that the ways of the Philistines and disobedience to His Word in holy things demands His judgment. How many in the past and more so today act like Uzzah when in service for God they employ the methods of the world and disregard entirely His Word. Godly fear and faithful submission to the Word of God are essentials in true service for God. Service without these is often a snare and results in dishonour.

Then the progress of the ark was arrested, because David filled with fear would not remove it to his city. The ark found a resting place for three months in the house of Obed-edom (servant of Edom); he was a Levite and therefore authorized to care for the ark (1 Chron. 26:1-5). Blessing rested upon his house. The judgment of Uzzah and the blessing of Obed-edom had a great effect upon David. "So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness." This is all we find in our chapter. But how did he bring the ark up? 1 Chronicles 15 gives the answer. "Then David said, none ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto Him for ever." The sons of Kohath, Merari, Gershon, etc., are given there. All is now done in accordance with the Word of God and blessing follows. And David filled with divine joy danced, girded with a linen ephod, before the Lord. After the ark had been set in its proper place in the tabernacle which David had pitched and the burnt offerings and peace offerings had been brought, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. In his dancing the king had taken a place amidst the people. And Michal, who is called here not the wife of the king, but "the daughter of Saul," despised David. She looked upon David's holy joy as an indecent humiliation, while the king declared he would even be more vile than thus and base in his own sight. What a contrast with the pride of Saul which is now manifested in his daughter Michal. And what happened when the ark had been put into the tabernacle? 1 Chronicles 16:4-36 tells us how David appointed Levites to minister and then he delivered into the hands of Asaph and his brethren a great Psalm of praise. And that sublime utterance looks forward to a far more glorious day, when the Lord dwells in Zion in the midst of an obedient people. Then the heavens will be glad and the earth rejoice and among all the

nations it will be said "Jehovah reigneth"; and even nature will sing in the presence of the Lord (1 Chron. 16:31-36).

4. The Lord's Promise to David and the Covenant

CHAPTER 7

7. The Davidic covenant

Verses 1-3. David desires to build the temple

Verses 4-17. The Davidic covenant

Verses 18-19. David worshiped

1. David's desire (7:1-3)
2. Nathan receives the message for David (7:4-17)
3. David in the presence of Jehovah (7:18-29)

We reach now a climax. The Lord speaks and reveals His great purposes He had in His eternal councils for David, the king after His own heart. We behold the king in peace sitting in his own house; he had rest from all his enemies. In pious meditation the heart of the king had but one great thought, one great ambition. The prophet Nathan is in his presence and to him he speaks. "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." And Nathan told him to do all that was in his heart. But he had spoken without divine authority. God knew all David planned and what was in his heart. While His prophet encouraged David to carry out his wishes, God meant otherwise.

That night Nathan received an important message. The Lord told Nathan that David thought of building Him a house, but that the Lord would build David a house. Then He promises him a son. "He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." Solomon is first in view, but he is only a type of Him, who said while on earth "a greater than Solomon is here." In Christ alone this great covenant-promise is to be fulfilled. Chastening for his offspring is announced, but a disannulment of the covenant is impossible, for God's gifts and calling are without repentance. "But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee, thy throne shall be established forever." More than that, this great covenant was confirmed by the oath of Jehovah. "Once I have sworn by My holiness that I will not lie

unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me" (Ps. 89:35-36). And when He was about to come, the Son of David according to the flesh, but also David's Lord, He who spoke these words to Nathan, it was divinely announced "the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David. And He shall reign forever and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). That throne and that kingdom He has not yet received. He fills the Father's throne in the highest heaven, but all heaven and earth wait for the appointed time when He will come again to claim His crown-rights and receive the world-wide kingdom, which David in inspired songs of praise so often beheld (Ps. 72).

"And this prophecy refers neither only to Solomon nor only to Christ; nor has it a twofold application, but it is a covenant-promise which, extending along the whole line, culminates in the Son of David, and in all its fulness applies only to Him. These three things did God join in it, of which one necessarily implies the other, alike in the promise and in the fulfilment: a unique relationship, a unique kingdom, and a unique fellowship and service resulting from both. The unique relationship was that of Father and Son, which in all its fulness only came true in Christ (Heb. 1:5). The unique kingdom was that of Christ, which would have no end (Luke 1:32, 33; John 3:35). And the unique sequence of it was that brought about through the temple of His body (John 2:19), which will appear in its full proportions when the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven (Rev. 21:1-3).

"Such was the glorious hope opening up wider and wider, till at its termination David could see 'afar off' the dawn of the bright morning of eternal glory; such was the destiny and the mission which, in His infinite goodness, God assigned to His chosen servant. Much there was still in him that was weak, faltering, and even sinful; nor was he, whose was the inheritance of such promises, even to build an earthly temple. Many were his failings and sins, and those of his successors; and heavy rods and sore stripes were to fall upon them. But that promise never failed."

And to this we add, nor will the promise ever fail in the future. Even now all is preparing for Him who alone is the Hope of the world. "Thy Kingdom come" is still the prayer, nor will it ever come till the King's coronation day arrives. And Nathan delivered faithfully the great covenant message. David's response is beautiful, yea it measures up to the fullness of grace the gracious Lord had bestowed upon him. He does not seek the fellowship of Nathan to talk over this unspeakably Wonderful promise. He sat before the Lord. All the thoughts in him, planning to work and to build the Lord a house, were forever hushed. He is in His presence as a worshipper, pouring out his grateful heart. Jehovah's grace has touched the innermost cords of his soul; they give forth their sweet

vibrations, which ascend in a holy melody to the courts above. He is humbled, bowed in the dust. "Who am I, Lord God? and what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto?"--He believes all he has heard; he trusts in every word. His prayer is "do as thou hast said." What an hour it was when the king with the message of grace and mercy was in the presence of the Lord! May we who are the Recipients of even greater grace in our Lord Jesus Christ respond to that grace as David did.

5. The Extension of His Kingdom



City of David - Ancient Jerusalem



The author of this Ebook was here in 2009. Here we are on the way to the Wall. Jerusalem, the capital of Israel and the most Holiest city in the World, is located in the center of Israel, on top of the Judean mountains (700-800M above sea level). This strategic location, first selected by King David 3000 years ago, made the city the heart of the biblical Israel and the Jewish faith, a Holy city for the Christian and Muslim faiths, and the capital of Modern Israel.

CHAPTER 8

8. David's kingdom established

Verses 1-14. David's conquests

Verses 15-18 David's reign

1. The Philistines and Moab smitten (8:1-2)
2. Hadadezer overthrown (8:3-8)
3. Further conquests and triumphs (8:9-14)
4. David's reign and his associates (8:15-18)

Great conquests and victories follow. David arose from the presence of the Lord to go forth to conquer. With such a message he had heard, assuring him of the Lord's presence and power, of the success of his kingdom, he began to extend his kingdom over the different nations which surrounded the land. The Lord was with him and preserved him withersoever he went. The history of these wars for

the enlargement of the kingdom of David we shall have occasion to follow a little closer in our annotations of the first book of Chronicles. The extension of the kingdom of our Lord when He comes and begins His kingly work among the nations, to rule them with a rod of iron, is foreshadowed in these events.

When we read in verse 15 of David's reign executing judgment and justice we have another faint picture of the rule of the coming King. The leading officers of the kingdom are mentioned. Joab was the general over his army; Jehosaphat the recorder. Zadok and Ahimelech were the priests; Seraiah the scribe. Benaiah had charge of the Cherethites and Pelethites; these two names mean "executioners and runners, while David's sons were also ruling with him. Order prevailed in all things. When that true kingdom will be established on earth there will also be those who rule under the King, who have charge over five or ten cities (Luke 19:17- 18). David's sons who ruled with him may represent typically believers who are sons of God in Christ and fellow heirs with Him.

6. David and Mephibosheth



CHAPTER 9

9. David's kindness to Mephibosheth

Verses 1-6. Mephibosheth brought to David

Verses 7-13. David's mercy to Mephibosheth

1. Mephibosheth brought to David (9:1-6)

2. Grace and mercy shown to him (9:7-13)

The story of Mephibosheth is the first thing mentioned after the government of David had been fully established. Typically it reveals the gospel in a beautiful way, and dispensationally the kindness of God which will be manifested in the coming kingdom. Mephibosheth is a type of the sinner and the condition which he is in. He was helpless, being lame of both feet. How he became lame is found in chapter 4:4. He fell and became lame, a helpless cripple. It reminds us of the fall of man and the helpless condition into which sin has put man. Therefore he could not come to David. He had to be carried into the king's presence. The sinner cannot come of himself to the Saviour; He has to seek him out.

And David wanted to show him "the kindness of God" for Jonathan's sake. "Thus the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man hath appeared" (Titus 3:4). God for Christ's sake shows His great kindness to sinful man. Mephibosheth means "shame out of the mouth"; when he hears from David's lips what kindness was prepared for him he confessed with his mouth his own shame and nothingness. "What is thy servant that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?" And what words of grace came from David's lips! Surely the kindness of God is here fully made known. He is lifted from his low place of shame to take a place at the King's table "as one of the King's sons." It is the kindness of God as made known in the gospel of His Son our Lord Jesus Christ. He takes us out of our shame and makes us one of His sons. "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem ; for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both feet." When the kingdom has come the King will show such grace and kindness to the poor and needy (Isaiah 11:1-5; Ps. 72:1-4).

7. The War with Ammon and the Syrians

CHAPTER 10

10-11. David's great sin

10;1-19. Prelude to the sin

11:1-27. The terrible sin

1. David and Hanun (10:1-5)

2. Ammon and the Syrians smitten (10:6-19)

The chapter with the war against Ammon and the Syrians is the prelude to the great sin of David. While Joab is carrying on the siege of Rabbah, the last city of

the Ammonites, David, no doubt flushed with the great victory and prosperity, remained in his house and committed his awful sin. The war with Ammon originated through the insults which Hanun the King of Ammon had heaped upon David's ambassadors. David wanted to show kindness also to Hanun as his father Nahash had shown kindness to David. We have no record of this kindness. In this endeavour David did certainly not follow the right course, for Ammon was an enemy, and while Nahash showed some kindness to David during his exile, he also had reproached Israel and was ready to thrust out the right eyes of the men of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam. 11:1-3). Hanun's deed in treating David's peaceful messengers in so shameful a way showed that he was a wicked man like his father and not worthy of David's kindness. Had he inquired of the Lord the messengers would have been spared these indignities. Ammon then formed an alliance with the Syrians, but Joab smote them. The greatest victory is recorded in verses 15-19. The king appeared himself to lead his hosts against the mighty foe and their overthrow followed. It foreshadows the day of final victory over the rebellious nations, led by the beast (Rev. 19:19-20) when the true King comes to fight against those nations.

III. DAVID'S SIN, CHASTISEMENT AND RESTORATION

1. David's Great Sin

CHAPTER 11

1. David's great sin (11:1-5)
2. David sends for Uriah (11:6-13)
3. The murder of Uriah (11:14-25)
4. David makes Bath-sheba his wife (11:26-27)

We see the king once more in his house. He sent Joab, his servants and all Israel to battle again against Ammon. Was it not his business as king to go forth with Israel as he had done before? Instead he remains in ease and comfort at home. Evidently he rested all day on his couch, during the heat of the day, and when the cool evening came he walked upon the roof of his house. He had been in self-indulgence and was self-satisfied with his great achievements. The spirit which characterized later Nebuchadnezzar when he walked in his palace (Dan 4:4) puffed up with pride, which preceded his great humiliation, was no doubt David's spirit also. Had he remained in the presence of the Lord, humble and depending on Him, as we saw him after the Lord had spoken through Nathan (7:18) this awful sin would not have happened. How often it has been repeated

in the experiences of God's people! Nor did this great sin like a mighty giant ensnare him suddenly. The way for it had been prepared. He had given way to the flesh before in taking wives and concubines. We read nothing of self-restraint or self-judgment in his life up to his fall. And had he not disobeyed the law in multiplying wives unto himself? It is written: "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deut. 17:17).

Had he really walked constantly in the presence of the Lord he would have heeded the warning of His law. What warning there is for all believers! The flesh is the same today as it ever was; it does not change. We are told "to make no provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14). Paraphrased this means, do not nourish the flesh by the indulgence of it; flee fleshly, youthful lusts. And now the culmination is reached. "I made a covenant with mine eyes; How then should I look upon a maid;" thus spake job (job 31:1). David knew no such covenant. He looks where he should not have looked and sin soon follows. It is a solemn illustration of James 1:14-15. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The king of all Israel had become another Achan. "I saw--I coveted--I took" (Joshua 7:20.)

"It need scarcely be pointed out, how this truthful account of the sins of Biblical heroes evinces the authenticity and credibility of the Scriptural narratives. Far different are the legendary accounts which seek to palliate the sins of Biblical personages, or even to deny their guilt. Thus the Talmud denies the adultery of David on the ground that every warrior had, before going to the field, to give his wife a divorce, so that Bathsheba was free. We should, however, add, that this view was controverted"

And sin follows sin. The offspring of sin is sin. What cunningness and deception followed. But honest Uriah frustrates his wicked plan. Did not David's conscience smart under it? No doubt it was deadened. Then he becomes actually the murderer of Uriah the Hittite. When the news of the death of Uriah is announced to David, hypocrisy is crowned in the words of the King, "Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as another." And here we read still the dreadful record, the sin of David and how God dealt with it.

"David, too, has faced that ever since, and faces it still: he will face it ever. It is put away, that sin, yet it remains, and will remain, type of all sins of his people, and of God's dealing with them: out of the holy light of eternity they will never pass,--out of our memories never! Here is man, here is his condemnation,--redeemed, saved, justified man! Thyself, reader; myself Cease ye from man

forever!--from ourselves, sinner or saint! Turn we to God forever, and let us ascribe greatness and salvation to Him alone.

"This is what an unexercised conscience can bring a David to. This is what lack of self-judgment, with temptation and opportunity, may make a saint! Shall we not cry afresh, with David himself, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting'?" (Numerical Bible)

And seven days later the equally guilty woman becomes David's wife. And she became the mother of Solomon. We find her mentioned in the genealogy of Matthew 1. Surely grace and mercy covered their sin. Yet what a trail of sorrow, misery and unrest follows, We shall find in chapters which follow the awful results. Incest, fratricide, rebellion, civil war and the king a fugitive! What a man soweth that he will also reap.

2. The Message of God and David's Confession and the Beginning of the Chastisement

CHAPTER 12

12. David's confession

Verses 1-13. The confession elicited

Verses 14-31. The chastisement begins

1. The Lord's message through Nathan (12:1-4)
2. David's anger (12:5-6)
3. Thou art the man! (12:7-9)
4. The chastisement (12:10-12)
5. David's confession (12:13)
6. The death of the child announced (12:14)
7. The death of the child and David's grief (12:15-23)
8. Solomon born (12:24-25)
9. Rabbah taken (12:26-31)

The Lord was displeased with what David had done. Nathan comes with his message in the form of a parable. His outburst of anger and condemnation of the injustice done to the poor man shows that he did not think of his own case. Yet sorrow and unrest were his portion; he tried to cover up his sin and as a result was in the deepest agony. Psalms like the sixth, the thirty-eighth, the thirty-second and others tell us of the deep soul exercise through which he passed. Then Nathan pointed at him with his soul piercing, "Thou art the man!" First the prophet tells him all the Lord had done for him; he reminds him of all God's kindness. What had David done? He had despised the Lord's commandment; had killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife. Then the chastisement is announced. He had slain Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon--the sword should now never depart from his house. He had taken Uriah's wife--others should take his wives. He had done it secretly--but, said Jehovah, I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. We shall find the sentence executed in chapters 13:28-39; 16:21-22; 18:14.

Then the King's heart broke. "I have sinned against the LORD." It was at that time that, his soul filled with deepest sorrow, and yet illumined with the light from above, he uttered that wonderful penitential Psalm, the fifty-first. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest." All the inward corruption now is revealed to him, as many a saint after him has found out by bitter experience that in our flesh there dwelleth no good thing. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). And when he prayed "take not Thy Holy Spirit from me"--he must have had a vision of Saul, the mad King, when the Spirit had left him and an evil one possessed his heart. But David knew God and God knew David. He is in the light and uncovers all in His presence. Then Nathan announced the divine mercy, "the LORD hath also taken away thy sin." And Nathan added "because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." That was the bitterness of it. Up to the present time infidels and rejectors of the Word of God point to David's sin and blaspheme, though the very things they sneer at are the things which they practice. The child died and David's grief was great. All his fasting and night long prayer did not change the divine sentence. But he also knew the comfort of hope and expresses it beautifully. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return unto me."

And has it no meaning that Solomon's birth is recorded immediately after these sad and solemn incidents? Solomon means "peaceful." Peace had come to his heart; the divine favour was restored unto him, yet the chastisement grievous and sore would follow him in the future. And then the Lord named also

Solomon. He called him "Jedediah." This means "beloved of Jehovah." He is the blessed type of God's own Son. For us He is "peace"--He who hath made peace and our sin is covered by His precious blood. To God He is "the Beloved." The record of the fall of Rabbah closes this chapter. What is recorded in verse 31 was cruel and barbarous. (However, there is a doubt about the translation. It has been rendered in the following way: "And he set them to saws and iron picks and iron axes and made them labor at the brick kiln.") Ammon did horrible things to the women of Israel . (See Amos 1:13.) A fearful retribution came upon them. How often it has been repeated in history, even down to the 20th century with all its boasted civilization, now collapsed in the greatest and most awful war the world has ever witnessed. And thus it will continue to the end, till the true King comes.

3. Further Chastisement: Ammon, Tamar, and Absalom

CHAPTER 13

13-14. Ammon murdered by Absalom

13:1-22. Ammon's sin against Tamar

Verses 23-29. Absalom murders Ammon and flees

14:1-33. Absalom's recall by Joab's craftiness

1. Ammon's wicked desire (13:1-5)
2. The incest (13:6-14)
3. His hatred (13:15-18)
4. Ammon murdered (13:19-36)
5. Absalom's flight (13:37-39)

"Behold I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house." This was Jehovah's sentence and it is now carried out. The evil which he had nourished in his heart, the passion which he had fed now breaks out in his own family. His oldest sons and Tamar, a daughter of David, half sister to Ammon, are the chief actors in the first tragedy. Ammon means "faithful." Thus he should have been, but he is the very opposite. Brought up in the midst of scenes of license, as it must have been in David's harem, the lust of the flesh gets the upper hand and the awful deed, a positive transgression of the law (Lev. 20:17) is committed.

The deed had been precipitated by a satanic adviser, Jonadab, a subtle man, and when it was done violent hate gave way to the violent passion of Amnon. Unhappy Tamar, outraged, insulted and hated, appears with her virgin-princess gown torn, ashes on her head, her hand on top of her head (the oriental way of expressing a heavy burden) and crying, and her brother Absalom discovers the reason of her sorrow. He then hated his brother Amnon. David heard of it also and was very wroth, but he made no attempt to deal with his son. We do not read a word that he even rebuked him. "The gloss of the Septuagint is likely to be correct, that David left unpunished the incest of Amnon with Tamar, although committed under peculiarly aggravating circumstances, on account of his partiality to him as being his first born son. This indulgence on the part of his father may also account for the daring recklessness which marked Amnon's crime. But a doting father, smitten with moral weakness, might find in the remembrance of his own past sin an excuse for delay, if not a barrier to action; for it is difficult to wield a heavy sword with a maimed arm" (History of Judah and Israel).

After two years the reckoning day comes. Absalom (the father of peace) becomes the murderer of his brother. It was an awful deed. In the midst of merrymaking, Amnon filled with wine, with no chance to repent, is cruelly slain. The sword is unsheathed and fell upon David's house. The harvest is on. What a man soweth that he will reap-murder for murder. It was an awful blow to David, for Amnon, his beloved first-born, the son of Ahinoam, was dead. Exaggerated tidings reach the court of David. "Absalom hath slain all the King's sons and there is not one of them left." And wicked Jonadab, the instigator of Amnon's crime, appears again and acts as comforter of the king. Jonadab is one of the most abominable characters in Bible history. We do not read of him again. Absalom, the fratricide, fled to Talmai, his maternal grandfather. He remained there three years; so this chapter covers a period of five years. Alas! who was responsible for it all? The scenes of lust and murder, outrage and bloodshed, revolt and rebellion, sorrow upon sorrow, grief upon grief, start with David's great sin. Pardoned he was, restored in every sense of the word, yet God maintains His holiness and chastised His servant.

4. David and Absalom

CHAPTER 14

1. Joab's scheme (14:1-3)

2. The woman of Tekoah before the king (14:4-20)

3. Joab brings Absalom to Jerusalem (14:21-24)

4. Absalom's beauty (14:25-27)

5. Absalom sees his father (14:28-33)

In all these records of those sad events we hear not a word that David inquired of the Lord. Joab now appears upon the scene again and that for evil, though he did not mean to do evil to the king. He concocts a scheme by which Absalom is to be brought back into the favor of the king. This he must have tried many times before, for verses 19 and 22 indicate this. It seems almost as if Joab imitated Nathan, when he came with his message to David. But God had not sent him and David's conscience was not touched. The wisdom he used was not the wisdom from above, but the wisdom of a cunning man. The whole story was deception and "the wise woman" of Tekoah lent herself as a willing instrument. And David finds out that it is all a plot and, blinded by a mere love for Absalom, without thinking of the claims of God in this case, he becomes a willing victim to the scheme of Joab. And so Absalom was brought back. The King commands, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face." It was an evil hour when it happened. Absalom's rebellion and the king's exile were the fruit of the unscrupulous plot of Joab.

Absalom's physical beauty was great with magnificent hair. (The statement that his hair weighed 200 shekels is undoubtedly the error of a scribe who copied the manuscript. The Hebrew letters which stand for 20 and for 200 are similar. It should no doubt be 20 shekels.) He was thus fitted to do the work of winning the people to himself and became the leader of a rebellion. The deed he had done in avenging the crime against his sister was most likely looked upon by the mass of the people as a noble and heroic deed. That behind the beautiful exterior there was a proud, violent and evil spirit may be seen in his deed, when after Joab's refusal to come to him, he set the barley field of Joab on fire. Then a reconciliation between David and Absalom followed: "Once more we notice here the consequences of David's fatal weakness, as manifested in his irresolution and half measures. Morally paralysed, so to speak, in consequence of his own guilt, his position sensibly and increasingly weakened in popular estimation, that series of disasters, which had formed the burden of God's predicted judgments, now followed in the natural sequence of events. If ever before his return from Geshur Absalom had been a kind of popular hero, his presence in Jerusalem for two years in semi-banishment must have increased the general sympathy."

5. Absalom's Conspiracy and David's Flight



CHAPTER 15

15. Absalom's revolt

Verses 1-12. Absalom's conspiracy

Verses 13-27. David flees from Jerusalem

1. Absalom steals the hearts of the men of Israel (15:1-6)
2. His conspiracy (15:7-12)
3. The flight of the king (15:13-37)

The beautiful prince gradually prepared for the great conspiracy of which we read now and which made of his own father the Lord's anointed, an exile. Chariots and horses with fifty men to run before him won no doubt the admiration of the people. His evident interest in their welfare, kissing those who sought his presence and advice, endeared him still more to the men of Israel. To this must be added his open words, which must have quickly circulated among the people, "Oh, that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice."

This continued for about four years. ("Forty" is incorrect. Ancient versions have "four years" which we take is the correct number. Others have suggested that the 40 years should be reckoned from David's anointing (1 Sam. 16:13). This, however, is unlikely.) During this time he stole the hearts of the men of Israel. All is now ripe for the great rebellion. He lies to his father about an alleged vow

he had made at Geshur. The unsuspecting King said, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron . The signal is given at which all the tribes of Israel were to say, "Absalom reigneth in Hebron ." Then he sent for David's counsellor, Ahitophel. He was away from Jerusalem at Giloh, a short distance from Hebron , which would seem that he also was in league with Absalom. Ahitophel (the brother of folly) was the grandfather of Bath-sheba. As his name so was his deed in joining the revolution, through which he may have thought of avenging the shame which had been put upon his family by David's sin.

When David hears the news he said to his servants who were with him in Jerusalem , "Arise and let us flee." Fear now takes hold on him. He feared for himself and for his city. Yet he passed through the deepest soul-exercise and clung to the Lord in all the chastisement which followed, stroke after stroke, upon him. The third Psalm gives the culmination of this. It bears the inscription, "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son." In spite of his fears he trusted the Lord. "But Thou, Oh LORD, art a shield for me; my glory and the lifter up of mine head" (Ps. 3:3). It is claimed that Psalm 49 also refers to this period of his life. If that is correct then David was sick at the time of Absalom's rebellion. Verse 9 in that Psalm would have a meaning in connection with Ahitophel, the traitor. John 13:18 makes it clear that Judas Iscariot is predicted; but Ahitophel is a type of Judas, like him he was a suicide. Another Psalm which was probably written during the rebellion of Absalom and which speaks of Ahitophel's treachery is Psalm 55. The king and his household left the city and all the people after him. All the Cherethites and Pelethites (executioners and runners) and six hundred which came after him from Gath accompanied the King. And not all was bitterness. Ittai (with Jehovah) the Gittite, and his devotion to the King, must have greatly comforted David's heart. He was a stranger and an exile, who had come but yesterday to David. He told him to return to abide with the king (that is, Absalom). Beautiful is his answer, which strongly reminds us of the blessed words of Ruth, the Moabitess (Ruth 1:16). What noble purpose he expresses! He wants to be with the king in life or in death. Grace has linked us even closer with our Lord. Ittai in his devotion and attachment to the king is a blessed type of those who are true to the Lord in the days of His rejection.

And there was much weeping as David passed over Kidron. Our Lord passed over that brook also to enter the garden (John 18:1) where He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears. The ark had been carried along, but now the king directed Zadok to carry it back to the city. "if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation." Beautiful it is to see that in all his great sorrow, conscious that it was the hand of the Lord which chastised him, in all his affliction he does

not forget the Lord. He trusts in His mercy. Deep submission breathes in these words.

What a sight the weeping king, barefooted, his head covered, ascending Olivet! A type of Him who also ascended Olivet and wept (Luke 19:41). Then Hushai (hasty) met David. Alas! for the evidence of unbelief in the king, in planning to have Hushai return to the city and feign friendship for Absalom so as to defeat the counsel of Ahitophel.

6. The Sorrows and Testings of the King

CHAPTER 16

16. David in flight; Absalom in Jerusalem

Verses 1-14. David meets Ziba and Shimei

Verses 15-23. Absalom follows Ahithophel's wicked counsel

1. Lying Ziba (16:1-4)
2. Shimei curses and stones David (16:5-14)
3. Absalom enters Jerusalem (16:15-19)
4. Ahitophel's wicked counsel (16:20-23)

Ziba in great craftiness meets the exiled king with provisions and acts as the false accuser of Mephibosheth. And David hastily puts all that belongs to Mephibosheth into his hands. Strange that David could believe in the falsehood of Ziba. How could one who was a helpless cripple aspire to possess a kingdom? Mephibosheth had been deceived (19:26) by Ziba and David readily believed the lying story.

Shimei (my fame) appeared, cursing David, stoning him and his servants. His accusation that he was responsible for "all the blood of the house of Saul" was unfounded and unjust. He was not responsible for the death of Saul and Jonathan, and equally guiltless of the death of Abner and Ish-bosheth. And yet David saw something else in the curses of Shimei and in calling him a bloody man. The blood of Uriah which he had shed must have suddenly come to his mind. And when Abishai offers to kill Shimei, David rebuked him. (See Luke 9:52-56.) "Let him curse, because the LORD hath said to him, Curse David"-- "Let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him." He realizes

Shimei is but an instrument in the Lord's hands; He had permitted it and David acknowledges thus that he had deserved the curses. "It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day." His eyes now look to the Lord whose chastening hand rested so heavily upon him.

Absalom is now in Jerusalem and Hushai succeeds in his commission given to him by David. He deceives Absalom. Whom did Hushai mean, when he said, "Whom the LORD and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I be"? They can only be applied to David; most likely in his heart he meant David. But it was flattery which wicked Absalom gladly accepted. Absalom followed the vile counsel of Ahitophel and committed the unnatural crime to show to all Israel that the breach between him and his father David was beyond remedy. God's predicted judgment upon David had come literally true. (See chapter 12:11-12.) The world will yet find out that God's judgments, though long delayed, will find ultimately their literal fulfilment.

7. Absalom, Ahitophel, and Hushai

CHAPTER 17

17. Ahithophel and Hushai

Verses 1-26. Ahithophel's counsel vs. Hushai's

Verses 27-29. David's friends minister to him

1. The counsel of Ahitophel and Hushai (17:1-14)
2. The counsel made known to David (17:15-22)
3. Ahitophel commits suicide (17:23)
4. Absalom pitched in Gilead (17:24-26)
5. The kindness of Shobi, Machir and Barzillai (17:27-29)

Ahitophel's counsel was aimed at the person of David only. He wanted to have him killed and thus by the death of the one man bring all Israel back. But Ahitophel had not reckoned with David's Lord, who loved him and in all the chastisement through which he had to pass, was still his Lord and his Keeper. It was not Hushai who defeated the counsel of Ahitophel, but the Lord. "For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahitophel, to the intent that

the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom." Hushai was evidently not present when Ahitophel spoke. When he came to Absalom and he asked his opinion he gave a different advice which Absalom and all the men of Israel adopted. The Lord gave the counsel through Hushai and then made Absalom and his men to follow the advice of Hushai. Hushai then communicated with Zadok and Abiathar as David had advised him. We do not follow the interesting story in its details. David heard of the counsel and the uncertainty of Absalom's movement and passed over Jordan into safety. Thus through Hushai's conspiracy, acting as a spy for David, the king had been saved. But would he have been lost if Hushai had not been acting the spy? The Lord would not have forsaken the king and though He used Hushai's counsel yet David was the loser after all. He lost the opportunity of seeing the Lord's power and intervention in his behalf. And how much we also lose by want of faith in Him, with whom nothing is too hard.

Ahitophel seeing his counsel defeated and unable to slay the king set his house in order and committed suicide. As stated before he is a type of Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of our Lord, as Ahitophel was the betrayer of David. Like Ahitophel Judas hanged himself (Matt. 27:5).

8. The Civil War and Absalom's Death





The Kidron valley, the route by which David left Jerusalem

CHAPTER 18

18. Absalom's death

Verses 1-8. The battle in the woods of Ephraim

Verses 9-18. Absalom's death

1. The battle in the forest of Ephraim (18:1-8)
2. The death of Absalom (18:9-18)
3. The tidings of his death and David's grief (18:19-33)

And now everything is ready for the battle and the victory. The army of David consisted of three divisions, Joab, Abishai and the faithful Ittai had the

command. David was ready to go forth with his warriors, but the people refused to let him go. What a testimony they gave concerning him! "Thou art worth ten thousand of us. But of Him, who according to the flesh is the Son of David, we say, "He alone is worthy." The king then stood by the gate of Mahanaim to see the departure of his troops. As his generals Joab, Abishai and Ittai left him he gave them the message, "Deal gently with the young man, even with Absalom." The battle took place in a wild jungle forest, most likely with many steep rocks and gulches. Absalom lost 20,000 men "and the forest (on account of rocks and gulches) devoured more people that day than the sword devoured."

Absalom fled, but his flight was arrested when his head caught in the bough of an oak, as Josephus states, entangled by his hair. "And he was taken up between the heaven and the earth and the mule that was under him went away." The first one who saw him would not smite him, not for a thousand shekels of silver, for he had heard the king's request. Then Joab, unscrupulous Joab, whose scheme had brought Absalom back into the presence of the king, took three darts (literally "staves") and thrust them through the heart of Absalom while he was yet alive. Most likely the unfortunate rebel son was unconscious through the impact with the tree. The armour bearers made a complete end of him. Joab's deed was unjustifiable in view of the king's command to deal gently with Absalom. Absalom's body was cast into a pit and covered with a very great heap of stones, a criminal's monument. He had looked for a more honorable death, for he had reared a pillar in his lifetime, which he called after his own name, "for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance." Those who claim that the books of Samuel are a patchwork of a number of writers who made use of different sources, refer us to chapter 14:27 and point out the discrepancy. But why should there be? Absalom may have put up this monument before he had any sons, or he may have lost his two sons.

And then comes the record of how the tidings were carried to David. The watchman announces that he recognizeth in the swift runner Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. "And the King said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings." All is well--is his message, while the anxious father-heart but paying little attention to the victory won, inquired for the young man Absalom. Cushie the second runner makes his appearance and he carries the tidings of Absalom's death, which he transmits to David in a tender and cautious manner. And then that grief. How pathetic! The weeping King, crying out over and over again: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

"The conduct of David in reference to his profligate son, is certainly extraordinary, but is not occasioned by weakness of character, which would be

inconsistent with the judicial severity with which he banished him from his presence during five years. The shameful and sinful conduct of Absalom may be viewed in two aspects: it exhibits, on the one hand, the operation of the curse which David's sin brought upon his house (2 Sam. 12:10), and the influence of the iniquity of the fathers, which is visited upon the children (Exod. 20:5); it exhibits, on the other hand, Absalom's own degeneracy and profligacy, which fit him to be the bearer of the family-curse. It was not in the latter, but in the former aspect, that David regarded the conduct of Absalom, for his own guilt is so grievous in his eyes, that, in comparison with it, he deems Absalom's wickedness to be inconsiderable. Hence arises the deep and boundless compassion with which he surveys his reprobate son. David's treatment of Shimei may be regarded in the same light; his consciousness of his own great guilt causes him to overlook the guilt of that criminal." (J.H. Kurtz, Sacred History.)

9. The Return of the King

CHAPTER 19

19. David returns as king

Verses 1-15. Judah calls David back as king.

Verses 16-40. Shimei, Mephibosheth, and Barzillai

Verses 41-43. Antagonism between Judah and Israel

1. The continued grief of the king (19:1-8)
2. The return of the king (19:9-16)
3. Mercy shown to Shimei (19:17-23)
4. Mephibosheth's joy (19:24-30)
5. Barzillai and Chimham (19:31-40)
6. Strife between Judah and Israel (19:41-43)

What grief must have been David's that "the victory of that day was turned into mourning"? And the people went about on tip-toe, like people ashamed after defeat. A great stillness pervaded everything, only broken by the loud and wailing voice of David: "O, my son Absalom, O, Absalom my son, my son!" All

mourned with him. But what a man must this David have been to endear himself to his men, that his personal grief became so completely theirs?

Then Joab acted. He speaks as a wise statesman. It was a bold rebuke, but well deserved, for David's continued mourning was more than weakness; it was selfishness. That he greatly resented the words of condemnation of Joab may be learned from the fact that immediately after he appointed Amasa as commander in chief of his army instead of Joab. The word was also spoken to bring the king back to Jerusalem from exile and he returned.

Once more Shimei appears upon the scene; he brings with him a thousand men of Benjamin and Ziba also. Shimei fell down before the King and implored his forgiveness. Though Abishai suggested his death, the mercy Shimei craved was readily granted and the King swore unto him. But the mercy shown was at the expense of righteousness. The ultimate fate of Shimei we shall find recorded in 1 Kings 2.

Mephibosheth appears next with undressed feet, untrimmed hair and unwashed clothes; he had been thus since the flight of the King. Ziba's deception practised on the King is now discovered. But David's conduct towards lame Mephibosheth cannot be justified. The impatience David showed when Mephibosheth speaks is proof that he felt guilty at the rash word he spoke to Ziba. Then he tells Mephibosheth that he and Ziba should divide the land. This was injustice. The deception of Ziba had deserved punishment. Beautiful is Mephibosheth's answer. It shows a love and devotion which is almost unsurpassed in the Bible. "Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the King is come again in peace to his own house." It was a sweet echo of Jonathan's love for David. It hardly needs to be pointed out that in all this David still acts as a natural man and not as guided by Jehovah and His Spirit. His object was to make himself still more attractive with the people and conciliate the different factions. If he had acted in faith, remembering that the Lord had called him into the kingdom and that He was able to keep him, he would not have tried to gain his end by such means. The bright picture in this chapter is aged and unselfish Barzillai. And the strife between Judah and Israel on account of the King is the first indication of the great division and the internal strifes, which many years later broke out among the people. Thus failure is seen on all sides.

10. The Revolt of Sheba

CHAPTER 20

20. Sheba revolts; Joab murders Amasa

Verses 1-22. Joab regains his position.

Verses 23-26. A list of david's officials

1. Sheba's revolt (20:1-2)
2. The ten concubines shut up (20:3)
3. Amasa's failure (20:4-6)
4. Joab and the death of Amasa (20:7-13)
5. Joab, the wise woman and the death of Sheba (20:14-22)
6. David's officials (20:23-26)

The final revolt in David's reign was headed by a wicked man, whose name was Sheba. Israel sided with him, probably as the result of the dissension recorded at the close of the previous chapter. Judah remained loyal to David. The act of David in shutting up unto the day of their death the ten concubines to live in widowhood was necessitated on account of what had taken place (16:21). Amasa being now the leader of the hosts of David (19:13) is called to subdue the revolt; but he proves a failure and could not mobilize the army. Abishai is commissioned then and with him is also Joab. All the mighty men, including the executioners and runners (Cherethites and Pelethites) pursued after Sheba. Then Amasa appeared on the scene. Joab was girded around his loins with a sword which was in the scabbard and the sword fell out. Joab picked up the sword but Amasa did not see the sword in his hand. Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand, while he held the sword in his left. Then he smote Amasa deliberately so that he died. He might have lied himself out of the accusation that he murdered Amasa by saying he fell into the sword and that it was an accident. But 1 Kings 2:32 gives the reckoning with unscrupulous Joab for the innocent blood he had shed. Jealousy had led Joab to murder Amasa. And Sheba was killed in Abel, the city in which he sought shelter. On the advice of the woman mentioned in the story, he was beheaded. The revolt ended.

IV. THE APPENDIX TO THE HISTORY OF DAVID

1. The Famines and the Wars with the Philistines

CHAPTER 21

21. Famine and Philistine wars

Verses 1-14. The famine and the Gibeonites

Verses 15-22. Memoirs of the Philistine wars

1. The Famine and the Gibeonites (21:1-14)

2. The Wars with the Philistines (21:15-22)

The fourth section of the second book of Samuel is an appendix to the history of David. When the great famine happened in the days of David we do not know. After the famine had returned year after year, for three years, David inquired of the Lord. Why did he not inquire in the first year? It is an evidence of the low spiritual state which prevailed at that time. The answer which David received revealed the cause of the judgment which rested upon the land. It was Saul and the blood-guilt in having slain the Gibeonites. The story of the Gibeonites is recorded in Joshua 9. They got in among Israel through deception and Joshua had made peace and a league with them. Though they belonged to the nations doomed to death they were permitted to live and became the hewers of wood and the drawers of water (Josh. 9:26-27). Jehovah's name and an oath assured them of their safety. Saul had violated this covenant and slain some of them. This wrong is now to be righted--David did not inquire again of the Lord what he should do but consulted the Gibeonites instead. And the Gibeonites demand not silver nor gold of Saul and of his house, "neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel."

After that they asked that seven men of his sons be delivered unto them and they would hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah. And again in haste the king promised to do so. Their demand, though piously worded, was not according to the law of God. Children were not to be put to death for the sins of their fathers (Deut. 24:16). Saul was the guilty one and he had died. How atonement for the broken covenant and the blood guilt was to be made remained for the Lord to say. David, not asking direction from Him, but turning to the Gibeonites, had failed again. And still the Gibeonites in their awful demand shared the bloodthirsty cruel character of the Canaanites. David carried out the awful request. He spared Mephibosheth. Two sons of Rizpah, a concubine of Saul, and five sons of Merab (Michal in the Authorized Version is incorrect), Saul's eldest daughter, are the victims. They were hanged by the Gibeonites and then left hanging. Sad it is to think that the horrible deed might have been averted if but David had again turned to the Lord and inquired of Him. And another law is

broken, when these bodies were kept hanging for months. "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day."

Surely the Lord could not sanction the deed so opposite to His own law. One of the most terrible scenes recorded in the Bible follows. Rizpah, the concubine of Saul, watched by her dead from April till fall, when it began to rain again. Six months she abode there, the only resting place the coarse sackcloth, above her the putrefying corpses of the seven men, including her two sons. While the hot oriental summer lasted she kept her awful watch and chased away by day the screeching birds of prey, while her nights were disturbed by the hungry howls of wolves and jackals. Could there be a more pathetic picture! And she gained something by it. When David hears of it he is stirred to action. The bones of Saul and Jonathan and the seven men who had been hanged were buried. And after that God was entreated for the land. It seems then that David turned to God and He was favorable to the land.

In the record of the battles with the Philistines four giants are mentioned. They represent the power of darkness, which the people of God must overcome. (For a full typical application we refer the reader to the Numerical Bible.)

2. David's Song of Deliverance

CHAPTER 22

22. David's great prophetic psalm

Verses 1-28. Praise to the Lord for his intervention

Verses 29-51. Praise to the Lord for exaltation over foes

1. The praise of Jehovah (22:1-4)
2. The sorrows of the past (22:5-7)
3. God's presence and intervention (22:8-20)
4. Reward and approval (22:21-28)
5. The judgment of the enemies (22:29-43)
6. The exaltation above the adversaries (22:44-49)

7. The praise of Jehovah (22:50-51)

It would take many pages to give an exposition of this great song which in the Book of Psalms, with a few changes, is known as Psalm 18. He uttered these words through the Spirit of the Lord. "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me and His word was in my tongue" (23:2). It is therefore a great prophetic utterance. The song takes us beyond David and his experience. His sufferings and deliverances are indicated, but they are but prophetic of Him, whose sufferings and whose victory are foreshadowed in David's life and experience. The great deliverance psalm includes therefore prophetically the story of David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In verses 5-7 we have David's suffering when an exile, persecuted by Saul; prophetically the suffering of Christ, who was compassed by the waves of death and who was plunged beneath these dark waves and saved out of death. Verses 8-20 describe the intervention. Nothing in the life of David could be made to fit this; but being a prophetic utterance there is no difficulty to trace here the resurrection of Christ, who was brought forth into a large place (verse 20). "He delivered me, for He delighted in Me" can only be truthfully applied to Christ. And all looks forward to a still greater intervention and manifestation of God. Verses 21-28 equally can only be true of our Lord. "For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God." It is impossible to say that David spoke of himself. The history we have traced gives a far different story. But every word is true if we think of David's Son, our Lord. And the judgment and exaltation described in the closing stanzas of this song will be realized in Him into whose hands the Father has committed all judgment. He will be "the head of the nations" and a people will serve Him (verses 44-45). That David had before his heart the great covenant-promise (chapter 7) and that his vision was enlarged so that he beheld "His Anointed" and His coming manifestation and kingdom becomes sufficiently clear in the last two verses of the song.

3. The Last Words of David and the Record of the Mighty Men

CHAPTER 23

23. David's last words; his heroes

Verses 1-7. His last words

Verses 8-39. Roster of David's heroes

1. His last words (23:1-7)

2. The names and records of David's mighty men (23:8-39)

In his last words an even greater and clearer vision is given to King David. "If Psalm 18 was a grand Hallelujah, with which David quitted the scene of life, these 'his last words' are the divine attestation of all that he had sung and prophesied in the Psalms concerning the spiritual import of the kingdom which he was to found in accordance with the divine message that Nathan had been commissioned to bring to him. Hence these 'last words' must be regarded as an inspired prophetic utterance by David, before his death, about the King and kingdom of God in their full and real meaning" (History of Judah and Israel). And this King is Christ and the kingdom that which will be set up with the second coming of Christ. As the translation in the authorized version is weak we give here a corrected translation:

David the son of Jesse saith, And the man who was raised on high saith, The anointed of the God of Jacob, And the sweet Psalmist in Israel : The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, And His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spake to me: A righteous ruler over men. A Ruler in the fear of God, Like the light of the morning when the sun riseth, A morning without clouds; When the tender grass cometh forth out of the earth, Through the clear shining after the rain. But my house is not so with God. Yet He has made me an everlasting covenant Ordered in all and sure; For this is all my salvation--all my delight, Although He maketh it not to grow. But the wicked shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, For they cannot be taken with the hand; And the man that toucheth them, Must have iron and the staff of a spear And they shall be utterly burned with fire in their dwelling.

Little comment is needed; just a little help to open up the words of the dying King. The righteous ruler over men, a ruler in the fear of God is our Lord. Thus He will yet rule over the earth in righteousness. And when He comes to rule, there cometh the morning without clouds when the earth will be refreshed, through the clear shining, the brightness of His glory, after the rain; after judgment is passed. Then David confesseth that his house is not so with God. His hope, his salvation, all his delight is in the covenant made with him; it centers in the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant. And the wicked will suffer the fire of His wrath.

In blessed keeping with this last great prophetic utterance of the King are the records and the names of the mighty men of David. They were the men who loved David, stood by him, showed their loyalty and devotion to the King. And others are given, of whom we read no definite deeds. The last name is Uriah the Hittite. The spiritual meaning is not hard to find. Before the judgment seat of Christ all will be made manifest. When He comes to be the righteous Ruler, to usher in the morning without clouds, those will be remembered who were loyal

and devoted to Him in His rejection. No name and no deed, even the smallest, will then be forgotten. What an incentive this should be, especially in the solemn days in which we live, when we see the day approaching, to serve Him and be as devoted to our absent, but coming Lord, as David's mighty men were to him. In our annotation on 1 Chronicles where we find these records also we hope to point out some of the details of the deeds of David's mighty men (1 Chronicles 11).

4. David's Failure: the Altar on the Threshing Floor of Araunah

CHAPTER 24

24. David's failure in the census

Verses 1-17. The sin and its punishment

Verses 18-25. The altar and atonement

1. The numbering of the people (24:1-9)
2. The sin acknowledged and Gad's message (24:10-14)
3. The pestilence (24:15-17)
4. The altar on the threshing floor of Araunah (24:18-25)

The final chapter of the books of Samuel is of much interest and importance. "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel , and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah ." In 1 Chronicles 21:1 we read "And Satan stood up against Israel , and provoked David to number Israel ." This has often been pointed out as a discrepancy and contradiction. Criticism has explained it in the following way: "Of surpassing interest for the study of the progressiveness of revelation in the Old Testament period is the form which the chronicler has given to this verse. To his more developed religious sense the idea was abhorrent that God could be subject to moods, and incite men to a course of action for which He afterwards calls them to account. Accordingly he writes: 'And Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel .' " There is no contradiction here nor do the two accounts need an explanation as the above. Israel had committed some sin which brought upon them the displeasure of Jehovah. Satan the accuser was then permitted to influence David.

The statement, "He (God) moved David," also means in Hebrew, "He suffered him to be moved." He permitted Satan to do his work. In 1 Tim. 3:6 we read that pride is the condemnation (or as it is literally "the crime") of the devil. And Satan the accuser moves David with national pride to number the people. It is significant that preceding this record are the names and achievements of the mighty men of David. No doubt his heart swelled with much elation over his victories and great achievements. While David's eyes were blinded by Satan, Joab saw the danger. In 1 Chron. 21:3 we read that he said to David: "The LORD make His people an hundred times so many more as they be; but, my lord the King, are they not all my lord's servants? Why doth my lord require this thing? Why will he be a cause of guilt to Israel?" The King's word prevailed and reluctantly Joab and the captains went forth to carry out the King's command. It was altogether a military census. But the census was not completed (1 Chronicles 27:24).

David's heart then smote him and we see him coming to the Lord and confessing his sin. "I have sinned greatly in that I have done; and now I beseech thee, LORD, take away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly." It was a true confession he made that night. Then the Lord sent the answer through the prophet Gad. The Lord leaves the choice to David. Either three years of famine, three months of flight or three days of pestilence. (This is according to 1 Chron. 21:12; 2 Sam. 24:13 records seven years, which must be the error of some copyist.) And here the man of faith asserts himself "Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD; for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man." And the Lord did not disappoint His servant's faith in His mercy. When the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it the Lord said, It is enough; stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord, the same who appeared to the patriarchs, to Moses, Joshua and others, was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Once more David's voice is heard in confession. "I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thy hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house." He was willing to be the one sufferer for his people; in this he is a type again of our Lord, the sinbearer. He is commanded to rear an altar upon the threshing floor of Araunah. "It was a fitting spot for mercy upon Israel, this place where of old faithful Abraham had been ready to offer his only son unto God; fitting also as still outside the city; but chiefly in order that the pardoning and sparing mercy now shown, might indicate the site where, on the great altar of burnt-offering, abundant mercy in pardon and acceptance would in the future be dispensed to Israel" (A. Edersheim).

It was the place upon which the temple was built (1 Chron. 21:28-22:1). And Araunah the Jebusite offered willingly the threshing floor and the sacrificial

animals. But David would not consent. "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing." For fifty shekels of silver he bought the oxen and the threshing floor. Then the burnt offerings and peace offerings ascended unto Jehovah as a sweet savour. And Jehovah answered by fire (1 Chron. 21:26). And David before that altar, who buys and offers, thus meeting the claim of God, is a type of our Lord who bought us with the great price and offered Himself And even so as this book closes with the Lord being merciful to His land and people, the plague stayed, so will Israel in the future receive and enjoy His mercy. It will be the result of the one sacrifice.

Christ in 2 Samuel

David was three times anointed: first in his father's house [1Sam 16:1-13], then over Judah, and lastly over all Israel. God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the oil of gladness. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, but as David-- though anointed king-- was in exile while Saul reigned over the people, so Christ is rejected by the world, and the "Prince of this world" is reigning in the hearts of men.

A day came when the men of Judah gathered to David and anointed him king in Hebron. "The Spirit clothed Amasai and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side" (2 Sam 2:4; 1 Chronicles 12:18). It is a joyful day in the experience of the believer when he yields the full allegiance of his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and says, "Thine am I, and on Thy side"; when he can look up into His face and say, "Thou art my King" (Psa 44:4).

"Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker" (2 Sam 3:1), until at last Abner said to the elders of Israel: "Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you. Now then do it: for the Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies." "Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh... And they anointed David king over Israel" (5:1-3). "One from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother" (Deuteronomy 17:15). "The king is near of kin to us" (2 Sam 19:42). "In all things made like unto His brethren" (Heb 2:17). Here we see all Israel united under their rightful king. A picture of a heart which is wholly true in its allegiance to the King of kings.

God's promise to Israel was that He would save them from all their enemies by

the hand of David. And this was literally fulfilled, from the day that he slew Goliath, all through his reign. We never read of his being defeated. So Christ has vanquished our great enemy, Satan. [Christ] has come "that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear" [Luke 1:74]. "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet" [1Cor 15:25]. "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa 9:7).

"And David took the stronghold of Zion" [2 Sam 5:7]. This is like the central citadel of our will. When that is surrendered to the Lord, His reign is established. [cp. 2 Cor 10:4,5]

In the story of Mephibosheth [2 Sam 9], we have a beautiful picture of the grace of our King, in bringing us nigh and making us "as one of the King's sons," "to eat bread at His table continually." He brings us into His banqueting-house and bids us partake, saying, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" [Song 5:1]. He Himself is the heavenly food, for He says, "The bread that I give is My flesh," and "My flesh is meat indeed" [John 6:51,55]. David's Sin.

But any type of our blessed Saviour falls short somewhere. And David, as a type, is no exception. We come next to the record of David's awful sin [2 Sam 11]. How can such a sinner be described as "a man after God's own heart"? [1Sam 13:13,14]. All through the life of David there is one characteristic which marks him out from other men, and in special contrast to Saul, and that is his continual trust and confidence in God, his acknowledgment of God's rule, his surrender to God's will. The great desire of his heart was to build God's House, yet when God sets him aside because he has been a man of war, he acquiesces with perfect grace to the Divine will [2 Sam 7:5-13; 1Chr 28:3-5]. When Nathan brings home to [David's] conscience the great sin of his life-- absolute monarch that he is-- he acknowledges it at once [2 Sam 12], and the depth of his penitence is such as only a heart that knows God can feel. For all time, the fifty-first Psalm stands out as the expression of the deepest contrition of a repentant soul. In that Psalm, David speaks of a broken heart as the only sacrifice he has to offer, a sacrifice which God will not despise. And the high and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity goes further in His wondrous condescension and says, by the mouth of Isaiah, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57:15).

The Bible does not cloak sin, least of all in God's own children. It does not spare God's saints. There were steps leading up to David's sin-- his multiplying wives, his tarrying still at Jerusalem when he should have been at the war. It is always the case that there is backsliding of heart, before it is seen in outward act. David sinned grievously, but his repentance was immediate, deep, and sincere. God,

indeed, blotted out his transgressions, according to the multitude of His tender mercies, but he did not remove the consequences of the sin: He chastened David through sore trials in his own family.

A Rebel

In the flight of Absalom, after the murder of his brother, we have a picture of a rebel soul far off from God. In David, we have a picture of God's sorrow over sinners. "The King wept very sore... And David mourned for his son every day... And the soul of David longed to go forth unto Absalom" [2 Sam 13]. In the word of the wise woman of Tekoa, "God deviseth means, that he that is banished be not an outcast from Him" (2 Sam 14:14, R.V.), we have an echo of God's words: "Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom," or "atonement" (Job 33:24, margin).

Even when Absalom was in rebellion, the King commanded, "Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom." In this, we see the forbearance of God with sinners. And when he heard of his death, he cried: "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" David would fain have died for the rebel, but he could not [2Sam 18]. How this carries our thoughts on to the One who was not only willing, but able to lay down His life, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God [1Pet 3:18].

Love's Allegiance

In David's exile [2 Sam James King West ch. 15-17], we have again a picture of the rejected Saviour. The eastern walls of Jerusalem are bounded by a deep ravine-- the torrent-bed of the Kidron. When the rebellion of Absalom drove David from his own city, we can imagine him coming forth by an eastern gate-- probably what answered to the modern gate of St. Stephen-- and following the winding path down the rocky side of the valley. The King did not go alone. A band of faithful servants went with him; and a little in advance, six hundred Philistines from the city of Gath, under their leader, Ittai, the Gittite. David had probably won the hearts of these men during his [stay] in the Philistine city of Ziklag, some thirty years before, and now they were ready to stand by him in time of trouble. When David came up with this band at the bottom of the ravine, he tried to dissuade Ittai from following him. He besought him as a stranger, and as one who had but recently joined his service, not to attach himself to a doubtful cause, and he bade him return with his blessing. But Ittai was firm, his place, whether in life or in death, was by the master he loved. Touched by such devoted allegiance, David allowed Ittai to pass over the torrent-bed with all his men, and with the little ones that were with him-- no doubt the families of the band. With the voice of weeping, all the exiles passed over, and climbed the

grassy slopes of the Mount of Olives on the other side. David set captains of thousands over the people that were with him-- a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. The devotion of his followers comes out at every turn. When they found that their King intended to go forth with them into the battle, they would on no account allow it, but restrained him with the words: "Thou shalt not go forth; for if the half of us die they will not care for us; but thou art worth ten thousand of us!" [2 Sam 18:3].

A thousand years have passed. Again a rejected King goes forth from the Jerusalem gate, and down the pathway into the dark valley, and up the slopes of Olivet. Instead of the strong band that went with David, there are but eleven men to go with David's Son, and of the chosen three not one remains awake to share His agony [Mat 26:36-46]. "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with Me" [Isa 63:3]. The enthusiasm of David's followers led them to restrain him from going into the battle. But when the soldiers came to take the Lord of Glory, His little body-guard all forsook Him and fled, and He who is the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely [Song 5:10,16], laid down His life for rebels and deserters.

Nearly two thousand years have passed since then. "Our Lord is still rejected and by the world disowned." There is still the golden opportunity today of making His heart glad by such a devotion as Ittai's. We are His blood-bought possession. It is His purpose that we should share His glory throughout eternity. And He claims our heart's love now.

Hushai the Archite and Zadok and Abiathar were to represent the King at the very center of rebellion-- "in the world, but not of it"; ambassadors in an enemy's country [cp. 2 Cor 5:20]. In Shimei, who cursed David in his rejection, we have a picture of those who reviled Jesus, wagging their heads and mocking Him.

"I will smite the King only," was Ahithophel's advice to Absalom, "and I will bring back all the people unto thee." "Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" [Mat 26:31]. Jesus, our Shepherd, was "stricken, smitten of God" for us [Isa 53]. And the King passed over Jordan, that river of death. The Return of the King.

We have a vivid picture of the return of David to the city of Zion [2 Sam 19:9-40]. The people clamoured for the return of the King. "Now, therefore, why speak ye not a word of bringing the King back?" The King heard of this and sent an encouraging message to the elders. "And the heart of all the men of Judah was bowed to the King, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the King, Return thou, and all thy servants."

"Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus" [Rev 22:20]. According to Eastern custom, the men of Judah went right over Jordan to meet their King, and bring him back, and the crowd of rejoicing subjects increased as they drew near the city. One day the cry will go forth, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him" [Mat 25:6]. The "the dead in Christ shall rise first," and the saints that are alive on the earth shall be caught up to meet Him in the air [1Thess. 4:16,17]. Our King has set this certainty of hope before us, and calls us to live in the joyful expectation of it. This should lead to faithfulness in service-- "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev 22:12)-- and [according] to holiness of life (Titus 2:11-14).

A Gospel for the Hopeless.

The "Mighty Men" of David's kingdom [2 Sam 23:8-39] were those who came to him in the time of his exile, when he was fleeing from Saul. They were escaped outlaws and criminals, but under David's leadership they became brave, self-controlled, magnanimous men, like their captain. "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there was with him about four hundred men" (1 Sam 22:2). "This Man receiveth sinners" [Luke 15:2]. It is a glorious Gospel that is committed to our trust! It is the Gospel for the outcast, for the refuse of society. It is the Gospel of hope for the worst and the lowest. The transforming power of the Cross of Christ is seen in changed lives wherever the Gospel is preached.

The Davidic Covenant

The kingdom concept reaches its zenith in the Davidic Covenant, which predicts the future millennial reign of David's greater Son, the Messiah.

Nature of the Covenant

In 2 Samuel 7 God promised David the following: "(1) David is to have a child, yet to be born, who shall succeed him and establish his kingdom. (2) This son (Solomon) shall build the temple instead of David. (3) The throne of his kingdom shall be established forever. (4) The throne will not be taken away from him (Solomon) even though his sins justify chastisement. (5) David's house, throne, and kingdom shall be established forever.

Solomon, the son of David, would be established on the throne of Israel, and God promised the blessings of the Davidic Covenant would be continued through

Solomon. The essence of the Davidic Covenant is given in 2 Samuel 7:16 and contains four important elements. (1) *House*. This refers to royal dynasty of David; God promised David a continuing posterity that would be of the royal line of David. This promise verified that the lineage of David would not be destroyed but would issue in Messiah who would reign over the earth. (2) *Kingdom*. The word *kingdom* involves a people and a dominion over whom the king will rule; it is the sphere of the king's rulership. It is a political kingdom. (3) *Throne*. The throne suggests the authority and the power of the king in his rule. (4) *Forever*. Forever emphasizes that the right to rule will never be taken from the family of David; moreover, the posterity of David will never cease to rule over the house of Israel.

Fulfillment of the Covenant

The nature of the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant can be understood in examining the initial fulfillment of the promises to David. Solomon's throne was a literal, political throne; therefore, the ultimate fulfillment through Messiah will also be literal and political (as well as spiritual). God reiterated the future fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant to David in Psalm 89. God swore in an oath to David that his lineage would continue forever and that David would have a descendant ruling above the kings of the earth (Ps. 89:3-4, 27-29, 33-37).

Other psalms anticipate the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Psalm 110, referred to as a "purely Messianic Psalm," anticipates Messiah subjugating the nations of the earth to Himself. The psalm anticipates His judgment of the earthly kings (110:5-6) and His subsequent rule (110:2). It reflects a conquering enemy (110:1). Psalm 2 has a similar emphasis. Despite the rebellion of unbelieving nations, Yahweh installs Messiah on Zion, the holy mountain of Jerusalem, from where He will rule the earth.

The Old Testament prophets also expected a literal fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant through Messiah. They reiterated the promises of the future fulfillment amid Israel's sin and apostasy (suggesting the unconditional nature of the covenant). Isaiah prophesied of the Son who would be given, exercising a governmental rule on the throne of David (Isa. 9:6-7); he spoke of the justice of Messiah's kingdom rule (Isa. 11:4-5). Jeremiah envisioned a day of tranquility in which a "righteous Branch of David" would "execute justice and righteousness on the earth" (Jer. 33:15). Jeremiah promised the continuation of the Davidic line enabling Messiah, a descendant of David, to fulfill this promise (Jer. 33:15-17; cf. also 23:5-6; 30:8-9). Ezekiel also anticipated the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant in which David (a title of Messiah) would rule over them (Ezek. 37:24-28). It is important to notice that the prophecy of Ezekiel was given to a nation that had apostatized continually and was now in captivity in

Babylon for her sins. Hosea also reaffirmed the covenant (Hos. 3:4-5), as did Amos (Amos 9:11) and Zechariah (Zech. 14:4, 9).

"Thus the Old Testament proclaims a kingdom to be established on the earth by the Messiah, the Son of David, as heir of the Davidic Covenant. The Jews expected such a kingdom for they took God literally at His word, which strongly and repeatedly confirmed the hopes and promises of the covenant with David."

Conclusion

Although the Old Testament thus far has emphasized considerably man's alienation from God through sin, the monarchical era has revealed that God will ultimately move to restore man from his subservience to sin. He will do it through Messiah, a descendant of David. God will eventually give Messiah an earthly political and spiritual kingdom over Israel and over the nations in which Messiah will rule in righteousness.

Questionnaire

Joshua

1. List the promises God gave to Joshua and note the conditions on which they depended. Study the promised land as the type of the Spirit-filled life.
2. What do you consider is the spiritual meaning of the `crossing of Jordan'? Note that it is the necessary condition before God can do wonders in us. What is its relation to the two main purposes of the miracle as stated in 3: 10 and 4: 23, 24 ?
3. Examine the spiritual dangers of compromise as illustrated in the story of the Gibeonites. Note Joshua's faithfulness and compare Ps. 15.
4. Examine Joshua as a type of Christ (Heb. iv. 8). Consider his name, his leading the people of God to the land of promise, his succeeding Moses (as gospel succeeds the law, Acts 13: 39).
5. What New Testament parallels are suggested by the stones of witness, the promised possession, circumcision, the cities of refuge?

Judges

1. Examine the teaching of the book on the working of God's Providence, especially in regard to the strange instruments He can use in effecting His holy purposes.

2. Note the reasons for failure. What are the corresponding dangers in the spiritual life (2: 11-19; cf. Mt. 9: 29)?
3. What spiritual meaning lies behind the reduction of Gideon's army? (See Dt. 20:8; 1 Sa. 14: 6; Mk. 6: 7; 1 Cor. 1: 26.)
4. Study the angelic appearances in Joshua and Judges and their relation to the incarnation (cf. Ex. 34: 5).
5. Note the selection in Heb. 11: 32-34 of instances of 'faith', and study how this faith was displayed.

Ruth

1. Compare the circumstances of Rebekah, Rahab and Ruth, all of whom were included in the line of messianic promise. Compare Acts 10: 34, 35 and Heb. 11: 31.
2. Note the parallels between the Magnificat (Lk. 1: 46-55) and the story of Ruth.
3. Note the references to the 'kinsman' and his right to 're-deern' (cf. Lv. 25: 25-31, 47-55; Dt. 25: 5-10; and Job. 19: 25), and see in these a foreshadowing of Christ, our Kinsman and Redeemer.

1 and 2 Samuel

1. Study the prayers here recorded and their answers.
2. See how the office of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King is foreshadowed and illustrated in these books.
3. How did David typify Christ in his person, office, and life.
4. Note the following Psalms as illustrating various events in David's life: (a) 24 and 51; (b) 20, 21, (c) 32 (d) 3, 4, 26 and 28.

Read the Bible Online

In English

King James Version (Public Domain Version)

<http://www.allonlinebible.com/>

In Dutch

<http://www.online-bijbel.nl/>

In French

Version Louis Segond (Normalement Domaine Publique)

<http://www.christianevents.mu/lire-bible-francais-louis-segond.html>

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